

NIKOLAI MEDTNER: PERFORMING IMAGINATION IN HIS *SONATA REMINISCENZA*,
OP.38 NO.1

by

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*With utmost affection to dear Mrs. Marina Geringas,
without whom none of this would be possible*

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Nikolai Medtner: Performing Imagination in his *Sonata Reminiscenza*, Op.38 No.1

To be undeniably staunch in one's artistic and moral compass is what often fuels the genius behind the mind, heart and work of the greatest artists in human history. Some find this passion along the way, changing their outlook manifested in their art as they go through life. Others, loyal and stubborn in their craft from the get-go, are determined to be their own unique, unwavering light shining through whatever may transpire around them. Such is the case of Nikolai Medtner, a musical composer who's genius knows only the bounds of the greatest structures of music making in history, and the bounds of his own heart. Medtner is resolute in his unwavering approach that music be based upon the classics and the traditions from where it grew, baroque polyphony, melodic and harmonic structure and music's higher artistic purpose. Amidst the constantly changing musical landscape around him Medtner remained defiant as ever, largely unchanging in style and outlook on art and self, all the while creating something new entirely. Sounds filled with rapture but always stoic and clean, compositionally perfect yet always leaving one guessing to their next unexpected flight of fancy. Deeply complex in contrapuntal texture, melodic and motivic unity, passion and darkness, pain and joy, the divine and the sinister, the delicate and the dance – but always maintaining through this the purest of musical intention and purpose, with a direct line to the listeners heart.

It is very often that the greatest musicians and scholars are discouraged by the sheer compositional mastery, or cerebral qualities of Nikolai Medtner's music. Medtner's music is a truly rare clarity of complexity, what may at first strike the ear as mind over matter, it is only as one has the courage to further delve into it, that it continually reveals itself. The following essay will serve to introduce through Nikolai Medtner's *Sonata Reminiscenza* Op. 38 No.1, just how

vast and overflowing his musical world is via an introduction on the life of Medtner; the music that greatly shaped his traditional, original style and his struggles to keep the integrity of his art; a thorough and detailed analysis combining a musical, performance, and piano technical analysis of the Sonata Reminiscenza; and a study and comparison of his musical culture, criticism and perspective through Medtner's compositional and pianistic style. Medtner's Canadian student Bernard Pinsonneault quoted the following from the Russian American music theorist and musicologist Joseph Yasser:

If Medtner is sometimes accepted with reserve, it is because certain musicians hesitate to recognize him openly for fear of passing far behind the times. . . These hesitant spirits are even more disposed to swallow the most incoherent constructions, no matter how corrupted (all as if they were the product of a wholesome art), rather than consent to recognize the work of a composer, who, like Medtner, has enough wisdom and will power not to depart from or stray from the true tradition of the masters. . . He is not a sterile conservative but an unforeseen pioneer to whom music is not only a revival of the finished past, but, on the contrary, a formidable spirit creating for the future; not a renaissance, but a classic resurrection. (37)

It is important to consider that much before becoming the masterful composer many are only now discovering him to be, Nikolai Medtner was arguably an even greater pianist. Born in Moscow in 1879 on Christmas Eve, he was born into a large artistic family of such rare, full support for Nikolai's musical aspirations. At the age of six his mother gave him his very first music lessons. This tradition of art and its fundamentals supplemented with a unique and curious imagination has built up through the family generations. Even Medtner's great-grandfather

Friedrich Gebhard who studied theology and music and “. . . Wrote plays and poetry . . . and, prophetically for the Medtner story, he worshipped Goethe, with whom he may have met and with whom he almost certainly corresponded (Martyn 1)”. Goethe becomes one of the main literary giants from which Medtner draws literature for his lieder, and even as a precursor to movements of his piano sonatas. Soon regarded as a piano prodigy at the age of six, he also gets the first inspirations for string playing and Chamber music – later his Violin Sonatas and Nocturnes, Piano Quintet - from his brothers’ violin lessons. Medtner’s wife Anna Medtner recounts, “. . . His eight-year-old brother Alexander began learning to play the violin, and Nicolas (Nikolai), of his own accord, and without outside help, to some extent mastered this instrument” (17). It is through accounts like this that one gets the clearest picture of Medtner’s zeal for all things music, and the ease by which he tackled it. Still, the artistic outlook with which his family lived proved just as important. His brother Karl was active in the community theater and in philosophy. His brother Alexander went on to lead a professional violin and viola career. And even more important than that, his brother Emil, not unlike his great-grandfather, developed a love for German culture and literature, including Goethe and Nietzsche and even became – “. . . Both leader of the cult of Wagner in Russia and guiding spirit of the Moscow symbolist poets” (Martyn 3). Medtner’s rich source of art cultured his desire to compose at a very early age, as without any compositional or theory training whatsoever, he would find any blank sheet of manuscript and write notes on it till they were all consumed! (A. Medtner 17). Medtner entered formal schooling at age 10 and it was at this time that he also began private piano lessons with his uncle F. Geodicke, also on his mother’s side, who was a professor at the Moscow Conservatory and an organist at a local Catholic Church. According to Anna Medtner it is said he developed his exquisite taste for the best music at that early age, demanding only to play the

great masters that have been the bedrock for all pianists to this day – including J.S. Bach and W. Mozart, two of the strongest influences in his music. He continued onto playing in children's orchestras with his brothers, and his ever broadening musical mind was furthered by orchestra concerts of the Russian Musical Society to which the family attended (Martyn 3).

Anna recounts, in 1892 one day he returns home from school in a rage, completely fed up with his current musical trajectory saying he is 'done with it!', which to him meant he must go to the Moscow Conservatory to begin serious music studies (A.Medtner 17). His brothers are supportive as ever, and despite his parents' emphatic disapproval, vouch for him seeing first hand his musical gifts and helping that his older brother was already making the same move later that year for the violin. Medtner thus "... Began his studies in the very year in which two other composer-pianists whose careers were to overshadow his own left the Conservatoire as graduates – Rachmaninov and Scriabin (Martyn 4). Medtner would have an easy time at the conservatory, particularly in his theory classes, finding a lot of spare time which he devoted to practising the piano and composing of his own on the side until he was lucky to earn the tutelage of Sergei Taneyev, who studied composition under Tchaikovsky, was winner of the Moscow Conservatory gold medal, and perhaps best known for strong criticism and backlash against the composers known as the Russian Five. Taneyev was also world renowned for his contrapuntal techniques, which proved a great influence on Medtner. The fear of Taneyev amongst the music circles did not seem to bother Medtner however, instead relishing his unrelenting style and shaping Medtner into the perfectionist he is to become. Taneyev writes "Medtner was born with sonata form" (A.Medtner 18). After studying counterpoint with Taneyev, it is interesting to note that Medtner moves on to 'free' composition, yet immediately abandons it as it went against his ideals and music, even making him feel considerably less 'free'. He explains later in his book *The Muse*

and the Fashion: Being a Defence of the Foundations of Art and Music – the lack of freedom from being forced to show something new for the sake of shock and awe, or the latest new device that abolishes the historical pillars, is the very opposite of music freedom and expression, music for vanity instead of purpose, art and meaning.

Meanwhile, Medtner was honing his piano performance skills daily with a man of equally high stature in both the Russian music world and abroad, Vasily Safonov. Safonov the pupil of Leschetitzky and teacher of Scriabin, Medtner began following in his teachers' footsteps. At the completion of his performance classes Medtner won the prestigious Moscow Conservatory gold medal. Safonov says at the award ceremony "this award for Medtner should really be a diamond medal, did such a thing exist" (18). It is at this time we see the beginnings of a formidable career as a concert pianist for Medtner. He also participated in the 3rd International Music Competition shortly thereafter, where he earned the first honorable mention playing the 5th Piano Concerto of Anton Rubinstein. As a result Medtner was also invited to play this piano concerto in Moscow and St. Petersburg, with Safonov conducting. However, Medtner's unwavering musical views and taste come to the forefront now, as he openly admits not liking the concerto, and when his teacher arranges it to be part of a European tour, along with other pieces showcasing Medtner's enormous technique, he is so disgusted with the idea that he cancels the tour altogether (19).

This appears for future generations to be a blessing in disguise, as he chooses instead to develop his roots in composition. Safonov was outraged after all he had done for him and did not speak to Medtner for quite some time. Taneyev however was elated and in full support of his new calling, along with the full support of his brothers yet again. Still, Medtner did not neglect his piano skills and would give solo concerts of his own music and a collection of the classics. Safonov later reconciles with him through letters of praise for his compositions, particularly his

songs for which he had heard performed in London. Thus Nikolai Medtner was being pulled in two directions through many aspects of his life and music.

In 1908 Medtner accepts a full professorship at the Moscow Conservatory. This however made it very difficult for him to concentrate on his love of composition and performance, and thus resigns only one year later. Still, he again returns to the Conservatory in 1915 as professor under the same title but chooses to remain this time due to financial hardship. Not long after the beginning of the Russian Revolution in 1917, in 1918 Medtner weds Anna Mikhaylovna Bratenskaya, who becomes Anna Medtner and was the former wife of his older brother Emil. As recounted by Anna, Nikolai Medtner was harbouring this love for many years with no relations with her until both of his parents passed away, and he had the full blessing of Emil. Medtner remains at the Conservatory until leaving his home country altogether in 1921 well after the Revolution. From a previous success where he played “Tchaikovsky’s First Concerto, with which he had achieved overnight fame in his first appearance abroad, in Hamburg in 1888, with the composer conducting” (Martyn 7), Medtner follows his deep love for the German masters by moving to Berlin. But now, upon considerably poor reception of his own compositions, rather than developing a niche for himself in the musical scene over time, less than two years later he moves to France. Medtner truly develops his disdain for Modernism here, citing that his own lack of popularity is due to their own blind devotion to the next new thing. His unwillingness to perform music of other modern composers of the time, even French countrymen Debussy and Ravel, further compounded his financial struggles, until he finally agreed to tours of America and Canada in 1924 and 1929. Between the North American tours he also managed another tour of his homeland Russia, as well as in Britain, a country unique in its reception as it absolutely falls in love with Medtner’s music – and therefore becomes his new home in 1935.

A chance encounter of Medtner's music by the Maharajah of Mysore (a city about an hour south of now, Mumbai, India), himself an amateur musician, was so smitten by his work that he founded the Nikolai Medtner Music Society for Medtner to compose and record as many works as he desired. This gave Medtner a newfound energy, as he then proceeds to record all of his piano concerti with the London Philharmonic, whose first president was the Maharajah, subsequently earning the dedication of Medtner's 3rd Piano Concerto. The following years were Medtner's most productive – composing and recording many of his piano sonatas, chamber music, shorter character pieces and songs.

At the onset of the Second World War, things became very difficult for Medtner as his funding and publishing money from Germany had completely seized, with his health simultaneously dipping further. As a result Medtner stops all of his current recording projects to finish composing one of his greatest works, the *Piano Quintet in C major*, and after its completion insists on recording it despite his health. His final recordings would be with the famous Elizabeth Schwarzkopf singing 14 of his songs on texts by Nietzsche and Goethe. Wife Anna recounts his last days,

Every attempt to cope with a big work proved exhausting. . . . Another attack forced him once more to give up working, and five days later the end came. He left the world in a serene and grateful spirit. It is left to me to express profound gratitude to His Highness The Maharajah of Mysore, who made it possible for my husband to make gramophone records of so many of his compositions, and thus to realise a dream that had seemed beyond all hope of fulfilment. (21)

Nikolai Medtner's *Forgotten Melodies Op.38* begin with the *Sonata Reminiscenza*, and thereafter are a collection of shorter character pieces whose material is based entirely off the one

movement Sonata. Composed from 1918 to 1920, and published by his main German publisher, Zimmerman in 1922, these were written during his 2nd tenure as professor at the Moscow Conservatory during one of the most compositionally prolific times of his life. The character sets take up a new dimension however, as they were written when he had briefly left Moscow to escape from the political strife during the Russian Revolution, residing in rural Russia surrounded by nature in midwinter. It is this longing and the simplicity, the purity of intention in the upholding of traditional ways that one may hear at the opening of the Sonata and throughout, and which Medtner may have directly been speaking of in his music. With the renowned painter and good friend Anna Troyanovskaya visiting at the time, she vividly recalls a moment together with Nikolai and Anna Medtner,

It was the evening in January, when a proper lamp was burning on the piano, something we thought a rare luxury and comfort. Nikolay Karlovich (Nikolai Medtner) called us to him, we stood by the piano, Anna's head rested on my shoulder, and he played to us for the first time in full his Sonata-Reminiscenza. Our total solitude in the forest, the winter behind the dark windows of his room and the richness of the piano sonority under his hands – all this made an absolutely magical impression on us. (Martyn 135)

The shorter works that follow are never given a clear direction to their purpose by Medtner. Perhaps to further play off of the 'forgotten', or 'reminiscing' titles in the set when basing each of their respective material off of the Sonata. Or, rather far less inspiring, elongating the opus purely on publisher request. This hardly seems the character of Medtner however, and while linking them so undeniably, they are the first of their kind for Medtner to be arranged together with a Sonata, a compositional form he usually reserved for his famous Skazka or Fairy

Tales – short character pieces as standalones or as their own separate opus. Medtner is not foreign to unique groupings of his works however such as in the *Forgotten Melodies*. He even composed other one movement Sonatas as part of a set of 3 Sonatas named Sonata-Triade Op.11– essentially three separate one movement Sonatas making a whole opus, but all with the same title and composed each with their own standalone Sonata form. Similarly, and also unique to Medtner, written just before his famous ‘Night Wind’ Piano Sonata in e minor, Op.25 No.1 comes a three movement Sonata-Skazka in c minor Op.25 No.1 which is essentially three short pieces, fast – slow – fast in the vein of his other Skazka (Fairy Tales), but also clearly made into one structure thematically and via movements in the likeness of a Sonata, with the 2nd movement/Skazka even leading into an *attaca* for the start of the 3rd. Upon the popularity of the *Forgotten Melodies* Medtner goes on to compose the Op.39 and Op.40 *Forgotten Melodies*, with the Op. 39 also balanced by the one movement Sonata Tragica, Op.39 No.5 an equally anchoring piece in the set of formidable scope and mastery, albeit with very different compositional and emotional underpinnings, and this time played at the end of the set with the entire lyrical middle section theme taken from the previous short work, the *Canzona Matinata* Op.39 No.4.

Like in the Op.39 *Forgotten Melodies*, and with the Op. 38 being Medtner’s first venture into such an opus structure, the *Sonata Reminiscenza* is now the anchoring larger work of the set, where the shorter pieces complement the Sonata in every way. The listener hears a particularly light side of Medtner in the short character pieces, that they are of immediate gratification for the listener, less cerebral and foreboding in nature, less compositionally and texturally complex.

The name *Sonata Reminiscenza* takes a twofold meaning, both in its nostalgic, melancholic, deeply reverent character; and in its literal ‘reminiscing’ via being the compositional lifeline of the entire *Forgotten Melodies* Op.38. It is thereby the nucleus from

which all other material is created throughout the complete set. And the short works, whilst sounding completely original, fun and earthy, bouncing from one fancy to another, dancing and passionate on a whim – perfectly balance out the scope and depth of the *Reminiscenza* with its cerebral and emotional weight, its overarching spiritual quality. After the sonata there is equal virtue hearing Medtner at his most whimsical and carefree; his most imaginative and improvisatory. The twofold balance thus takes shape – what the listener longs for in the character pieces if listening to them separately, they find in glorious abundance in the Sonata. If listening to the Sonata separately – and one longs to ‘come up for air’ amidst it’s at times overwhelming profundity – they have the character pieces. Perhaps in Medtner’s reasoning and knowledge from the reception of the Op.38, the Sonata’s breadth can already tire all but the most advanced, discerning listener, so Medtner chooses instead the Sonata at the end in the following Op.39, and the shorter works here lead up to an excited tour-de-force in the Sonata Tragica, but are now only distantly related to it, with the exception of the *Canzona Matinata*. Furthermore, one can even listen to the symmetry provided by both the Op.38 and 39 *Forgotten Melodies* when listened to in succession, with structural pillars in the contrasting Sonatas at the very beginning and very end, it provides an entirely new structure as a whole, and perhaps even an entirely new vision of a recital program.

The *Sonata Reminiscenza in A minor in Op.38* however, played first in the set, is no chance experiment for Nikolai Medtner. In symmetry with his lifelong views towards music as earlier mentioned and explained in his book *The Muse and the Fashion*, Medtner here is at his most refined and clear in voice, passion and structure. It is as if Medtner is laying the foundations for the entire cycle in the textually and compositionally simplest means possible. It is void of the overflowing drama and technical virtuosity that one hears in the *Sonata Tragica*

from Op.39, and also of those modern movements of which he so often maligned in his book. A battle which can sway to either extreme in other works, the *Sonata Reminiscenza*, taken to even further heights when hearing the complete cycle, is a singularity of mind and heart for Medtner.

Н. Медтеръ, Op.38.
N. Medtner,

Allegretto tranquillo (Andantino con moto) M.M. ♩ = 72
sempre espressivo e disinvolto

p semplice

una corda e poco Pedale

poco riten.

(N.Medtner, Zimmermann 2)

Example 1 – Theme 1 Introductory Theme

Following along in the score published by *Zimmerman*, the *Sonata Reminiscenza* Op.38, begins with its opening introduction, the thematic material that is both the primary compositional toolset and emotional bedrock upon which the entire Sonata itself is based. Medtner's somewhat ambiguous marking of *Allegretto tranquillo*, together with the curious *sempre espressivo disinvolto* and *semplice* already signal the emotional weight, yet reserved, objective view and stoic underpinning of the work. While clearly acting as an introduction both in fully establishing

the key, the primarily textural canvas actually has the double stemmed *tenuto* voice in the soprano right hand as our first theme, one which manifests itself in countless ways throughout the opus. Equally reserved and simple as the texture and Medtner's expressive markings, this first theme moves simply and straight forwardly up and down the A minor melodic scale. Curious for an opening theme of a Sonata, yet it is his treatment of such, the indicated *una corda* and equally important left hand oscillating chords that give a truly euphoric texture of sound. Although later rife with developments culminating in its own passion, it now provides a simple framework, thereby typifying his treatment of the entire Sonata. The left hand is not a mere accompaniment, with the indicated *tenutos* a clear representation of this. It must echo the right hand's melody in the most subtle of ways. If Medtner is 'reminiscing', one could hear the song of Anna in the soprano and Medtner's clear love for her throughout their life, their mutual support of one another, via this tender, subtle duet. Still, it is interesting to note the *tenutos* are only in the first phrase and not in the second. Could this be a publisher omission or an unmarked *simile* like other markings that stop in measure (m.) 3? One tends to play the opposite however, with the *tenutos* of the left hand in the second phrase and not in the first, adding a new layer of interest and expression the second time around, and particularly as the left hand's jumps expand in range (third system, Example 1), so as to hear both members of the 'duet' reaching upwards together before they resolve down. Furthermore, the very deliberate slur markings between each beat in both hands throughout the entire opening introduction indicate a subtle sighing motive, which only grows in stature as the piece progresses. This also lends itself to a specific gesture, a circular arm gesture connecting each of the eighths (rather than a down-up motion, bass to tenor, as the notes would suggest without the slur) required in the left hand to achieve this slur/sighing affect. The right hand remains close with minimal movement while the left hand moves with

these naturally circular motions, also avoiding stiffness in sound production with the wrist and arm, particularly as the left hand range increases in the third system. This approach and subtle slurring, together with the *tenuto* interplay between the hands – as is Medtner’s intention – always keeps the music flowing forward, as the long phrase beckons, hearing the pulse in larger beats and measures, in contrary to what the notes may first seem to suggest. The introduction then comes full circle at the double bar line in the final measure (last measure, Example 1), not only in the closing of the theme but also as Medtner chooses to end on the aforementioned bridging slur between the beats, A-C – a two note idea that becomes the crux of the next theme, and beginning of the Sonata proper.



Example 2 – Theme 2

(2)

With the double bar clearly indicating the end of the introductory theme, we have the main theme and body of the Sonata beginning at the *concentrando*, Example 2. As the indication would suggest, together with the *meno mosso*, Medtner is asserting himself and the music, what was a nostalgic free flowing ‘reminiscing’ in the introduction is now a firmly grounded, unwavering sensibility. Further outlining this is a noble, resolute thematic language punctuated by frequent elongations on the strong beats and thick sonorous texture in the middle register of the instrument. Indications of *mf* and *tre corde* immediately assert the pianist in this theme, which is a call to arms now for the Sonata after the ‘reminiscing’ theme. The hand must also feel the weight of these emotions. With the sixths in the right hand one hears the orchestration and

depth of sonority reminiscent of horn calls, and with a full weight of pathos and authoritative emotion, this is translating into the weight of the hands and arm through natural gravity, and realized behind the fingers and their tips to create this. Together with an equally resolute *legato*, it is not a mere pressure and weight transfer of the fingers – it is with the aforementioned hand weight together with undulations of the wrist that carry you throughout the sixths pattern – that one achieves the full breadth and sonority of the chords. Interestingly, this approach, contrary to many other piano performance applications also begs for a fairly balanced voicing between all four voices. No doubt the main melody exists in the soprano, but it is far too thin and uncharacteristic of Medtner’s passion and deep Russian-Romantic sound to only voice that far above the others like a bell to create only color. Furthermore, hearing all four voices can be seen as both a psychological and musical foreshadowing of many of the thematic treatments soon to come in the Sonata. And as seen in Example 1, Medtner is fully aware in his use of double stems when a voice should be especially brought out, but clearly does not do that here.

As contrasting to the introduction as the theme may be in character, they are actually much closer than one may first realize. As Charles William Keller’s dissertation *The Piano Sonatas of Nicolas Medtner* explains when speaking of the Sonata *Reminiscenza*, he plainly and seemingly prematurely states,

“All themes are in the minor mode and are constructed from the ascending-descending scalar pattern of the introductory theme. Other than this common factor the themes have little motivic similarity and show more individuality in their respective melodic-rhythmic motives than homogeneity” (Keller 204).

Conversely however, it is this very oneness in melody and rhythm whilst upholding the imaginative individuality of each statement, which binds it throughout the entire scope of the Sonata. When one looks closely examining the skeleton of the melodic line of this main theme 2 (Example 2) they notice the same scale-like melodic structure that was the material of the opening. They also notice a similar rhythmic pacing to both themes. As in the introductory ‘reminiscing’ theme, the first three measures here remain largely static in melodic shape, returning to the note A with rather predictable regularity. Yet within this, beginning with the A-F# sixth, Medtner is already beginning his rise up in the second half of m.2 – which soon after completely takes hold of the theme through the scale-like rise of all 4 voices (m.3-4). The mimicking of the introductory theme rise and fall continues to follow in the consequent fragmentary phrase starting in m.5 in the left hand with a fall of a third to end the phrase from G in m.5 to E in the final measure, again like theme 1’s aforementioned C-A closing in its final measure. This theme thereby becomes a hybrid, with its distinctive character, but highly influenced in every way from the theme 1 introduction’s melodic shape, pulse and direction.



Example 3 – Theme 3

(2)

First appearing in the final measure of the introductory theme left hand, as the opening tie motive begins the 2nd main theme (Example 2), so does Medtner use the same tie as linkage into the 3rd main theme. As we know now, Medtner wastes no time announcing themes in immediate succession in this Sonata, as efficiency, clarity and transparency are his chief motivators. In *The*

Muse and the Fashion Nikolai Medtner writes, “We cannot visualize contents outside of form, just as form turns into a dead scheme the minute we consciously separate it from contents. . . The contents of music, indefinable through words, demand the most clear-cut form in sounds” (122-3). Building upon the strength awakened in the 2nd theme he now emits his true confidence, with the forte and the rigidity of the staccato chords in the outlying voices. Yet Medtner maintains the singing core voice, maintaining its central position in the SATB, a core dense rhetoric that seemed immovable in theme 2. The seeming meandering of the 16ths that go from harmonic to melodic from theme 1 to 2 now develop further as the chief propelling idea of theme 3. As seen in Example 4, this same technique can be seen in the linking rising broken 7th chord – a device itself deriving from the opening broken chords – into theme 3 and the rising A minor arpeggio 32nds into the immediate restatement of theme 3 thereafter, a near literal restatement in place of the consequent that now puts the melody in the upper voice, up an octave, asserting itself as the peak of the preceding arpeggio. Interestingly, Medtner’s middle voice is now further creating flow, borrowing directly from the introductory theme’s harmonic 16ths yet maintaining the new staccato energy from theme 3.

The image displays a musical score for a piano and voice. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system has a vocal staff (treble clef) and a piano staff (grand staff). The vocal line features a melodic line with some staccato notes and a lower line with sustained notes. The piano accompaniment includes a broken 7th chord and an arpeggio. The second system continues the vocal and piano parts. The piano part features a rising A minor arpeggio in the 32nds. The score includes various musical markings: 'dim.' (diminuendo), 'p poco lusingando' (piano, a little seductively), 'leggiere' (light), and 'poco riten.' (a little ritenuto).

Example 4 – Secondary Theme

(3)

This second half restatement/consequent of theme 3 however doesn't resolve. This time, when Medtner lands on D he suddenly begins a move in a completely different direction. Through use of material from the 2nd theme, in measures 3-4 of Example 4 he is now winding out of the dramatic theme 3 into a joyful, simple D major secondary theme. Marked *poco lusingando*, this entirely new idea is a nostalgic momentary bliss amidst the emotional weight which has preceded it. *Lusingando* marking the playful, enticing, even suggestive side of Medtner, the connectivity to its contrasting surroundings is still organic. While all motion seems to have stopped with the static pacing of the melody in the right hand, in wonderful ingenuity it is again the same pacing demonstrated in the first two themes with the static, unison, tied melody that punctuates the beginning of the first two measures. Furthermore, the subtle grace note is a signature characteristic of Medtner throughout his entire compositional output, it is one which often characterizes his light-hearted tender side. The immediately following tied E emerges from this, and resolves down to D in a pleading, yet alluring sigh of romance.

Further strengthening Medtner's previous *espressivo*, *tranquillo* and *cantando* markings, the sensitive pianist must be keen in his awareness of tone throughout. The translation of these markings in the multiple renderings of *cantabile* achieve a storyline all on their own. As the previous theme 3 morphs into the secondary theme m.3-4 Example 4, so must the musicians' song, through their tone, sing a profound *resolute cantando* now softening up into the *lusingando* D major. What is at the depth of the key or key bed, through weight transfer and arm weight to create the dramatic character and tone, must now merge into a lighter touch, foregoing the arm and hand weight almost completely. The finger legato together with a supple, mobile wrist, must equal Medtner's supple reminiscence here at the secondary theme. Intermittently however, this new broken octave idea provides an element of rhythmical dance and with the repeated notes as

16ths even alludes to a continuation of *staccato* from theme 3. This seemingly new ‘flight of fancy’ out of the emotional regret, is further outlined in the left hand, as Medtner now logically utilizes the piece’s opening broken chord motive as a passionate sweeping canvas for the melody. These left hand waves come to typify Medtner’s emotional surges throughout much of this work. Common as a tool of musical motion and passion for many great composers, it is often dwelled upon in the language of music critics, in speaking of the music of Brahms and Rachmaninov compared to Medtner, for example. Ernest Newman sarcastically argues against this unfounded criticism, “I cannot understand why Beethoven did not write like a Fleming. . . It would appear if you have German blood in your veins you must inevitably write in ‘a thoroughly Brahmsian style’ (9).

The secondary theme melody however continues to rise, scalar and in *stretto*. What was initially a tender recalling dance, is now rising in emotional urgency, and the left hand now plays the role of the right hand in the introductory theme. If theme 3 (Example 3) was not enough, the contrapuntal elements in Medtner’s music here have further come to the forefront in their clarity of expression. Although unmarked, subtle emphasis by the pianist on the upper notes in the broken chord of the left hand further outlines the same indication in the introduction, while at the same time the right hand merges from the *stretto* secondary theme to a transformation of the wandering 16ths in theme 3, before resolving down. Medtner chooses to remain and cadence in D major however, as in the final two measures of the secondary theme (Example 4 m.11-12) Medtner flips the voices and continues the theme of the right hand via *staccato* which affirms the joyful, whimsical character into the cadence, in direct contrast to the initial usage of *staccato* as the dramatic and *risoluto* theme 3. The right hand now strengthens this interpretation to bring out the upper notes in the left hand broken chords, as the right hand chooses to play only these notes

to bring us into the cadence in a beautifully *cantabile* culmination. Medtner's use of multiple thematic elements, and ingenious contrary motion from the antecedent through consequent crossing over in the hands, via use of his contrapuntal technique, bring this opening section to an uplifting close.



Example 5 – Transitory Thematic section

(3)

Aided only by the *poco ritenuto* and a quarter note value (Example 4 m.12), Medtner then immediately returns to the weight of the emotionally introspective in the following harmonically ‘developmental’ transitory thematic section seen in Example 5. Despite this, Medtner is always careful and deliberate in his continuity, his organic musical flow. The final measures of the secondary theme show a distinctive tied D in the inner voices, one which has a dual role. Inner voices which were left out of the secondary theme altogether, initially to thin out the texture and emotional weight, Medtner is now reintroducing them as a reminder and precursor to the next section's return to full harmonic texture. As well, while the tied D's further emphasize the tonality and character of the secondary theme, they also directly connect us to the *a tempo* section in Example 5. Much in the same way as the final measure of theme 2 the tied D is a musical and technical hand-off, but also an emotional transfer in the leanest means possible. Medtner here sparks the character's final solidifying positive character, while at the same time, through the D tie in the left hand (Example 4 m.12 tenor voice) and the *ritenuto*, he melts into a state of foreboding, nostalgic reminiscence beginning in m.1 of Example 5. Medtner uses the

direct antecedent of theme 2 but in a much less overtly dramatic and emotionally confident manner.

As declaimed countless times by Medtner to never write ‘just for the sake of it’, the linking tied D’s role is still greater. As in the secondary theme we hear the joyfully pleading E-D elongated, falling slurs to reside now in the comfort of the D major tonality, the following D ties now rise back up again to E in Example 5, whereby the D is a mere 7th in the dominant of A minor. This instant shift puts the listener immediately back on emotional unrest, and is one such transformation that the pianist must be fully aware of. The voicing of this next section must reawaken the E as a primary note at the outset. With the left hand theme 2 material now in a dominant harmonic state of flux, this momentum thus continues the tied D moving to E and then F# etc. in the tenor.

The right hand’s octave figuration provides further unity to the melody of the secondary theme’s octave leaps, and its incessant repetition in pitch remind one of the very opening of the Sonata while putting one on edge. Compounded by the left hands’ subtle slurring and use of rests (m.4 Example 5) to provide rhythmic impetus and syncopation, this pushes the listener in an expressive yet almost ominous way. Still, even the right hand’s use of ties, while at first seemingly unnecessary, further echo the left hand and all the tie-unifying concepts employed thus far. Therefore, to achieve the clarity of expression through all transformative voices coming throughout the secondary theme, takes a special kind of focus and coordination between the hands and the ear, not unlike the most complex fugal writing. Compound this with Medtner’s clear intention to move forward in this section, as with many of the most contrapuntal sections in the Sonata, this must be practiced diligently with each idea separately to firmly characterize the individual motivic statements before bringing them all together. Finally, only by this meticulous

attention, do these thematic elements become ‘marinated’ in one’s ear and pianistic touch, thereby always announcing themselves clearly even if not in the foreground, organically unifying the entire work.



Example 6

(3)

Building upon this contrapuntal nature, in this transitory section, as the recalling of theme 2 in the left hand rises, so does it fall to end fittingly on a tie – only to begin its rise once again via use of new melodic material derived directly from the melodic skeletons of themes 1, 2 and 3. In Example 6 the interwoven hands’ melodic fragments create a system of rising waves in *stretto*, each higher than the previous, giving an overwhelming sense of growing passion through dialogue. The accompaniment is now moved to the middle voice, its syncopation abandoning the 16ths to become a literal off-beat eighth note palpitation. This time however, the accompaniment must remain solely in the background to give way to this dialogue, particularly as the left hand voice is so close to it, even overlapping the hands. Just as one hand falls the other rises - a chief element that reigns throughout the Sonata. The pianist must signal these entrances of each melodic voice to assert the next level of emotional urgency. Hidden inside this new 16ths passage in the right hand in the final two measures is the continuation of a right hand fragment

that actually rises A-A#-B (m.8-10 Example 6) preparing us for the next theme. This beautiful counterpoint initially makes the ear go from the A-A# in the right hand to the G-F# in the left hand in a performance, but one must listen to the rise all the way to the penultimate B in the next section. At the same time, even harder to master is the dual role in the right hand's final two measures as Medtner brings back this tie/drone idea in the lower voice. Together both voices split in contrary motion to reach that same B, however due to their opposite rhythmic intentions one must be sure not to sit on the alto voice too heavily, as this inadvertently chops the flowing right hand that becomes the canvas of the next theme.



Example 7 – Theme 4

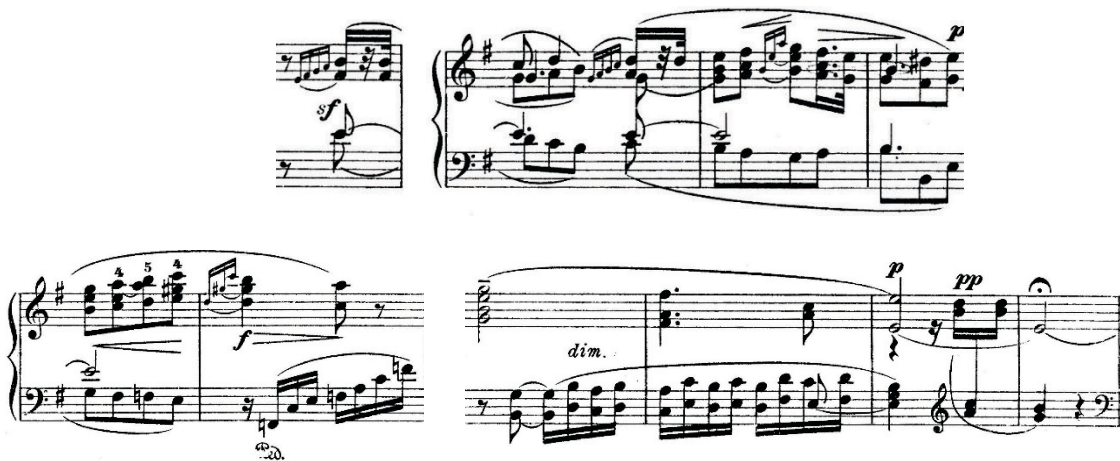
(4)

In what has clearly been an emotional struggle thus far, the waves of passion subside into serenity reminiscent of the opening introductory theme. And rightly so, as Medtner chooses to use the same unhurried 16ths flow in the right hand. For this new theme 4 in Example 7, as is his marking *meditamento*, the scalar melody in the left hand now takes an expressive yet contemplative approach in its character. There is an unknown drifting quality to its direction and purpose, as is further outlined by its successive phrases alternative between major and minor modes. And it is clear, as is a trademark of Medtner, that in his almost exhaustingly long phrase here he does not want to let this memory, this reminiscence be forgotten so easily. What was the depth of tone and passion via a relentless *legato* in the previous section, must gradually subside and lighten up in the final two measures heading into theme 4. The final drop down to a low B

must signal a new chapter in his nostalgic journey, a completely new color and aura of sound must envelope the ear. Use of the indicated *una corda* aids this, but it is more about a state of mind, and an awareness of the ear and spatial sound for the pianist. They must attempt to sit back, upright and hear the color of the harmony and expansiveness of range on the instrument as if the sound coming from the back of the instrument, and the swirling gentle wind of the right hand while the left hand pierces through that coloristic fog. In essence, you are painting a different picture with the sonority and harmony, and one that can now be seen as a slowly moving canvas of *affekt*, a picture of perpetual motion as you play. Amidst this musical perfume however there is a pervading stillness and coldness, a residing pain. Medtner offers a brief oasis in the major mode, immediately tainted in the next phrase as we once again start our resolution downward, until finally resigning in the minor mode from whence we began. Each reiteration of this melody conjures up an altogether different emotion and nuance, what some may view as a struggle of key relationships is merely just a fluctuating, yet resigned emotional nostalgia, a dialogue amongst oneself. Medtner combines this perfectly at the signaling of the final phrase: with the G major tonality beginning to take hold, and offering hope, Medtner immediately signals his underlying regret by turning the G in the very next harmony into the 7th of a IV⁷ of the original E minor at the outset of the theme.

The sensitive artist must always search for the meaning of such subtleties, as their performance then becomes that much more vocally inclined – they speak to the audience, even the composer. One must color the 7th chord differently for example, thereby reawakening the ear to something seemingly entirely new, even though it is a rekindling of where we began. If the pianist's touch is more focused in the outwardly passionate sections, the pianist must now remember the very supple wrist that aided the introductory theme so well. The right hand 16ths

benefit from both, and in the left hand one must choose wisely to not forego the depth of the singing line. The scalar part of the melody can be helped with a supportive weighted wrist, while the concluding harmonic/cadential idea at the end of each scalar pattern now loosens with a circular wrist motion in the direction of the rise and fall of the 4th interval (m.4 Example 7). Therefore, the left hand here must always retain its singing legato, its voice from a singular heart, throughout its elaborate shape.



Example 8 – Theme 5

(4)

As the wandering yearnings of the *meditamento* theme envelops the listener in its emotional weight, Medtner immediately pulls us out with the juxtaposition of the next theme. Firmly grounded back to reality, this earthy, rejuvenate theme 5 reawakens the energy that came to depict themes 2 and 3, providing a new vision for E minor. In a swooping gesture the preceding grace notes sweep the listener up from the depths of resignation. In this Sonata he is gathering energy into this new theme via the grace notes, which also help to soften the immediate change in rhythmic pace from 16ths to static chords. Furthermore, in what would be an otherwise hollow rest before the beginning of the theme, the grace notes emerge amidst the rest as if to increase the speed of the previous 16ths to prepare the new theme. The broken chord

grace notes in the consequent of the phrase act as a rhythmic and harmonic displacement or upper neighbor to the next chord, in a most decorative but expressive vehicle, much in the same way one would realize such a figuration in the music of Chopin, which is often written as just a broken chord in his music without the grace note treatment.

As a particular challenge to the pianist, is to equally reassert the physical awareness of the instrument and the fingers after the end of theme 4 into theme 5. The pianist must take both musical and mental advantage of the rest to prepare for the next section. To keep one's fingers sharp, strong and focused as the previous phrase ends, particularly firming the tips soon after he plays the final B, thinking only of the dexterity and clarity of annunciation that is immediately at hand. If not practised in this manner and paid specific attention to, the grace notes are all but waiting to come out as a rhythmically or tonally uneven error in one's technical utilization of the passage. While slurred, the notes must be immediately crisp and brisk in the vein of the energy of the new theme. Furthermore the realization of the fourth interval in the right hand that follows together with the very close lower voices (m.1-2 Example 8) can cause one or more notes not to sound due to the rapidly repeated 2nd finger on note A (which is particularly glaring if there are holes in the grace note run due to flaccid fingers). While attempting this all with the right hand (with the G with the stem down played as part of the left hand chord) clearly seems to be Medtner's score indication here, the near proximity of the lower voices allows one to redistribute with the chord to play all notes in the chord with the left hand except the top voice. Another option is to play all the notes written in the Treble clef with the right hand, with the thumb playing both the A and G. However, one must be aware there is a new challenge in this rearrangement to focus the voicing of the chord correctly as if split accurately between two hands as Medtner intended, and to not sound like a block with one hand, especially when

considering the option using the thumb for two notes. Rather, technically and musically intertwined, one's attention must always be focused on bringing out the carefully placed ties in the inner voices while the right hand focuses on the ornamental runs and carrying the melodic line above. Utilizing this approach therefore relies much less on one's focus of the repeated notes, and provides a subtle means of achieving both the perception of technical mastery and the overarching musical goals, rather than relying largely on chance that the right hand achieves both the grace note run and the fourth in such clear rapid succession in the original hand distribution.

While sounding undeniably fresh, theme 5 also remains close to its other counterparts thus far, static in its return to the original note in the antecedent phrase before rising up and similar in the skeleton of its rhythmic pacing. Anchored by the now iconic, linking ties of the Sonata which are here embedded in the inner voices, they come to foreshadow what is soon to transpire in the piece. Medtner chooses to repeat the short theme immediately after its initial statement, only the second time around it climbs even further into the first truly openly passionate outburst, Medtner's romanticism in full-flight if but for a very brief moment. The sweeping left hand, while at first sounding new in this passionate outburst, is taken from the D major secondary theme oasis. It now builds upon the sweeping gesture of the previous theme to signal a return to the beginning of the Sonata's theme 2 *concentrando*, with the passionate arpeggiation still underneath. Medtner closes out the section in theme 2, but this time chooses to end on an e minor chord (as opposed to that of E major/V in theme 2's original statement). Thereby, all along the counterpoint of the ties in theme 5 that were neatly tucked inside the expression now come to the forefront as they were anticipating the return of the opening ties of theme 2 all along. The choice to end on e minor seems an incredibly subtle change as the final measures are nearly identical to the original statement of theme 2. However, adding to this

subtlety is the added thickness of the e minor chord signalling the final phrase. Compared to its first time around in theme 2, it is now keeping a higher level of passion from whence this section emerged. Yet at the same time, the absence of the grace notes preceding the next chord, followed by the e minor mode at the end, brings the listener immediately back down to earth, in their now regrettably familiar, nostalgic depression.

Ending this restatement in Example 8 Medtner uses the same note, E, tied over for two measures into what is initially a repeated transitory theme in the following section. It is interesting to note however, that while in theme 2's initial statement the tied final E links us to an immediate 16ths note surge into theme 3 (not unlike the aforementioned sweeping grace notes into theme 5), this time the E is of longer value and is actually tied to nowhere! The connecting slur indicating the tie continues to the end of the measure but is not written as continuing forward onto the E of the beginning of the repeated transitory theme. Could this be a simple notated omission by Medtner? This writer, as performer as well, believes it is a clear and intentional continuity of Medtner's pervading hopelessness. With the fermata overtop the E the listener is now feeling the full weight of this emotional oppression, and the 'unending' tie further illustrates this longing unresolved nature before resigning back to the transitory theme.

The image displays four musical staves from a score, arranged in a 2x2 grid. Each staff contains musical notation with various performance instructions and markings.

- Top Left Staff:** Marked *molto cantabile e espressivo*. It features a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation includes a crescendo (*cresc.*) and a fermata over a note. Below the staff, there are markings for *f* (forte) and a triplet of eighth notes.
- Top Right Staff:** Continues the musical line with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. It includes a slur over a group of notes.
- Bottom Left Staff:** Marked *diminuendo* and *riten.* (ritardando). It features a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The notation includes a decrescendo (*dec.*) and a fermata over a note. Below the staff, there are markings for *p* (piano) and a triplet of eighth notes.
- Bottom Right Staff:** Marked *tranquillo, ma a tempo*. It features a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The notation includes a *pp* (pianissimo) marking and a slur over a group of notes. Below the staff, there are markings for *sempre con Pedale* and a triplet of eighth notes.

In what has become its own theme of resignation, Medtner's choice to climb up melodically before falling back down is given a new treatment. Taking the sighing dialoging fragments from the transitory theme and turning them on their head, becoming the greatest outburst of lyrical passion thus far. In its initial statement (Example 6), as the build-up gathers emotional energy and the hope of something greater, Medtner turns this energy around and chooses to dissipate it, linking it into a new recollecting Theme 4. Now the rising of each melodic fragment and sequence in the previous phrase finally comes to its satisfying realization. By taking the A-A#-B which concludes the phrase in Example 6 and now reaching all the way up to the E, Medtner is abolishing the scalar patterns that have come to typify the Sonata thus far. This reach is the outcry of passion but also a brief diversion and hope of emotional fulfillment. Albeit his always present chromaticism, Medtner's choice then to flirt with the major mode while reaching always upwards puts the listener and performer on a sense of emotional euphoria, they are suddenly upon emotional wings, flying highest at the outset, but clearly still struggling to maintain such optimism which each rising fragment beginning lower in register.

Medtner also expands upon the texture giving a fuller harmonic color to the pulsating inner voice. While at first we hear a three note chord in the inner voices to signal this new surge, it is his use of this two note chord pulsation in the inner voice right hand that make the difference. Now no longer static, their intervallic language is greater and in clear contrary motion to that of the right hands' melodic leap up. While only the lower voice of the middle texture is moving, the upper voice maintains the incessant, largely static nature of the inner voice pulsations while the lower voice is linking with the left hand in the next measure. This melodic opening up or branching out in contrary motion is the compositional language by which one feels

this remarkable surge in passion. While the right hand's lower voices proceed in a similar static motion from before, the left hand continues this momentous drive downwards through the use of the expressive 6ths that characterize theme 2 and the beginning of the preceding transitory section. This culminating approach even encapsulates the introductory theme with its subtle rise and fall scalar patterns between the hands. While still in the Exposition of the Sonata, this is Medtner with a developmental focus which drives the entire Opus 38 combining all the elements of a work to create something fresh and new. While reserved or resigned in the introductory theme and many of those that followed, one is consumed by passion and fittingly plays each of these rekindling motivic fragments in a way in which they may have desired from the start. Medtner thus makes this transformation from the *disinvolto* and *meditamento* into the now marked *molto cantabile e espressivo*.

As in the previous dialogue phrases of the transitory theme which precede the *molto cantabile e espressivo*, where the dialogue of melodic fragments overlap in a *stretto* language, so does this new outburst and extension of the transitory theme. The pianist must be fully aware of this overlap so as to not play the remaining left hand singular melodic notes from the previous phrase (Example 9 m.1) with the new emotional energy that the right hand surges in with. Furthermore, the added melodic interest and initial thickening of chord in the inner voice should not be over-stated. By default it is overbearing and will completely cover the expressive soprano melody if not executed in a similar articulation and dynamic as the transitory theme. It's added thematic, textural and expressive interest come out on their own due to the suddenness of the emotional outburst amidst a literally repeated transitory theme. The pianist can consider a momentarily deeper touch and fuller voice of the chords, one which Medtner seems to have already thought through via the scoring of it. Medtner makes the initial chords full eighth note

values, without rests, citing their added expressivity and more legato touch, and this is confirmed by the previous discussion of how this continues into the left hand in the following measure. The right hand in the next measure must be off the chord soon however so as to keep its original rhythmic integrity. At the same time the pianist must take into account how the continuing left hand counter melody can easily over power the right hand melodic fragments, and thus only take advantage of fully hearing this when the right hand is momentarily paused on the ties or dotted quarters. Medtner interestingly further helps this along pianistically through the *diminuendo* markings of the left hand, with the top and loudest of each descent coinciding with the most expressive moments of the right hand, or during its pause.

Medtner then chooses to end the statement (see Example 6) with the last 2 measures as cadential but also linking it to the next theme via variation of the current material. The natural tendency is for one to play the final two measures' extension before the *tranquillo, ma a tempo* (Example 9 m.8-9), in the same manner as the previous phrase. While the right hand has come down and remains once again on a tied E note via the descending sequence and cadence together with the *diminuendo*, the left hand continues with the same rhythmic and textural application as the emotional outburst. However, the left hand is now in a vastly different musical context and emotional backdrop then from whence it began. It has clearly also calmed to a large degree, but more importantly, its new condensed scalar pattern is a direct result of this resolution. Both melodically and rhythmically it is a very important precursor in these ways, foreshadowing what is immediately heard overlapping it – the statement of the next theme. Therefore, while the singing *legato* must continue, it has translated back into a much lighter touch, creating and foreshadowing the coming *tranquillo*. The clarity of texture must open up to an even greater to degree as if to emerge from a fog; the right hand entirely accompanimental, merely continuing

out until its last breath of the rhythmic syncopations of the inner voice; the left hand extra aware of its subtle purpose and voicing itself carefully amidst Medtner's *piano* marking. Thus this two bar extension, this textural link, takes its dual role as both settling the hearts' outburst while preparing the completely new emotional affekt and melodic contour of theme 6.



Example 10 – Theme 6

(5, 6)

Not unlike that which transpired leading into Theme 4 (Example 7), the listener is almost exhausted in their own desire to break free from these depressing cycles of emotional events.

Meanwhile, Medtner is giving the listener on the journey this very passing picture of nostalgia – hopeful, joyful, but

that underlying

is then, that Medtner



almost always with

regret and sadness. It

has fully captured the

listener into this reminiscent 'trap' of the Sonata. Applauded from the earliest days of his

compositional career, Medtner makes this work well structurally – the large-scale structural and

phrase aspects of the rise and fall harken back to the oldest traditions of musical composition and

its mastery. However, Medtner is now taking advantage of this as an equally important and

concurrent emotional tool, inherently playing on the mind and heart throughout the work.

And it is this that makes the next few sections beginning in Theme 6 all the more revealing. Thus we now begin a journey in which Medtner tries to find answers and disrupt it,

break free of its oppression. At the outset of Theme 6, one discovers the first specific *tranquillo* by Medtner in the Sonata. While the discerning listener and performer will cite the opening overall tempo marking of *Allegretto tranquillo* at the beginning of the work, they must remember this is an overarching affect for the entire work, and more importantly one that defines the iconic opening Theme 1 introduction. Emerging through the first true emotional outpouring in the previous section this is more than just a reaffirmation of this marking. While at first glance the texture is also similar to theme 4's *meditamento* (Example 7), one must first find in the heart, then in their tonal and textural pallet the means to differentiate each. With theme 4 a searching, nostalgic presence, it also includes an *espressivo* in the left hand. In theme 6, distinctly different from theme 4's marking and the *molto cantabile e espressivo* in the previous section of Example 9, there is no *espressivo*. The melodic line of the right hand emerges overlapping with the same drifting harmonic character and structure of the left hands' accompaniment pattern that preceded it. We are now also given the marking of *pianissimo* with a left hand that sounds like a drifting wind. Continuous with the 16ths flow as a tool in other themes, and that started from the very opening of the work, Medtner is now using the alternating note pattern taken from theme 2 and which began the previous transitory theme section. Still, never void of meaning, he combines both this flow and the scalar melodic pattern embedded with the left hand's alternating descent. This provides a direct link with the entire Sonata while also providing a seamless transition from the left hand's eighths descent gestures in the previous climax.

To be fully aware of this only empowers the performer with further zeal, yet given Medtner's *tempo* and character indications here one must be extremely subtle in his approach. The *legatissimo* indication may immediately cause the performer to interpret this as an overtly expressive marking, but here it is all about the continuity, especially in the left hand. To achieve

this long line one can even over-hold the scalar notes in the left hand, thereby almost connecting them as eighth note values between the harmonic 16th notes. They must however be careful not to put too much weight in the touch in either hand. A weight which is dually a concern due to Medtner's subtle inclusion of the ever-linking tie motive in the middle of each left hand descent. One may over emphasize this b minor tonic reinforcement via the tie due to its motivic implications throughout the work, but its inclusion is simply to do that harmonically, while creating that subtle link to the past. Overtly bringing this out sectionalizes the descent thereby interrupting the left hand flow and distracting ones ear from the right hand melody's initial phrase. A heavy hand, over-pressing too deep into each key and its subsequent weight transfer will likewise create a heavy, overbearing sound. Yet we have already come to terms that it is exactly what Medtner does not want here. The thinness of texture and leanness of tone thus must aid the elongated line and subsequent lift of the emotional affekt.

Aspects of hope and light carried forward by right hand melody now, highly harmonic in intervallic movement at the outset, can be seen as largely new material in this vein. However it is clearly built upon variations and fragments of different themes as well as accompaniment figures which ties the listener in, increasing its organic livelihood and meshing within the work. Harmonic figurations taken from the opening introduction and further utilized in accompaniment patterns in the D major secondary melody (Example 4) and even closer to that of the cadential melody in the consequent of theme 4 (Example 7) and the very next theme 5 accompaniment in Example 8. What may seem as melodic 'filler' or variation in the later parts of the theme are actually permeations of what we have become very familiar with thus far. If vigilant of these characteristic linking tools used by Medtner, one interprets each motivic idea with a purpose and with a pre-existing foundation. For example, the repeated b minor chords in the right hand

appear to be only rhythmic harmonic insistence, but are rather a variation and recalling of the subtle harmonic punctuations or ‘echoes’ used at the end of theme 2 (Example 2) and its return after theme 5 to close the section, seen in Example 8. This culminating approach to analysis and its subsequent performance execution results in a fuller awareness of Medtner’s reasoning behind such a motivic device and structure. Thus the pianist now plays them as a suitably lesser addendum, rather than overplaying them due to misinterpretation of the indicated *tenutos*. These *tenutos* clearly tell the pianist that Medtner still wants them spoken and expressive, and thus rightly so they are different than its earlier iterations from which it was born. But keeping its foundations and subtlety in mind is of the highest importance, as this creates an eternal link and overarching structure for the entire work.

The second half of the phrase of theme 6 seen in the pickup to m.5 of Example 10 heightens this new journey of seeking something new. One hears an increased pace via an apparent restart of the opening material of this theme but this time in diminution using 16ths in the melody to increase its flow to that of the left hand. Soon after begins the second broken chord which is played also in 16ths but now pushed further forward via scalar rise of the octave. As this further increases the momentum and the new attempt to reach up out of this oppression, Medtner here also does a brief cadence in a minor. This cadence in our home key together with the rising scale in the right hand and descending scale within the left is a direct homage to the opening and another strong unifying link for the performer, however subtle it may seem in passing. Medtner continues this push further, ending the 8 bar theme with the varied echo via the repeated *tenutos*. And if one was to believe this direct opening homage is only by chance, they only need to look no further than how Medtner changes the left hand scalar descent in the final

measure of the theme (Example 10 m.8) into the very same broken chords moving by step from the opening introductory theme.

This switch in figuration propels the music going forward for the next 8 measures.

Medtner now combines many of our musical memories in this *Sonata Reminiscenza* in a culminating approach. Where each musical statement and theme was clearly separated before, he

now combines elements in a



combines of them peaking

emotional struggle in this final climax of the Exposition. Beginning with the opening of the new theme, Medtner now immediately chooses to intermingle it with a return to the second half of theme 3's 16th note alternating note pattern to further increase the agitation and momentum.

Amidst a series of rises up the scale only to fall back down, this entire closing can even be seen as an emotionally intense microcosm and recapping of the entire work thus far.

Medtner arrives on a high F sharp in b minor at the first emotional and structural peak of this section, only to once again fall down chromatically. Only this time this chromatic fall is immediately interrupted taking a D sharp in the melody back up to E and returning us right back to theme 6 in its original key. While this may seem like another cyclical emotional depression as explained earlier, Medtner is instead building upon the emotional energy with robust staccato *agitato* indicated chords in the right hand that are reminiscent of the left hand from theme 3; he stamps the new climax *forte* plus *espressivo marcato* for the left hands theme 6 restatement; and calls for a large elision going directly to the rising scale in the second half of the theme – all leading to an almost jarring contrast from its humble *tranquillo* first statement only 16 bars ago.

a.



Example 11 – a. Exposition Climax

(6)

b. Introductory Theme 1

It is this new found strength and emotional upheaval that allows us to finally reach the true peak of this deeply complex and multi-layered Exposition. As seen in Example 11a, Medtner now makes one final push towards the top, utilizing the thickest and most sonorous texture used thus far. Fragmentary motives of the previous melody, this time deliberately taking the 16ths alternating note pattern and sectionalizing it between rests while rising, creates a written in *accelerando* in the musical pacing, heightening the urgency and feeling of agitation. In the left hand, while seemingly only a further splicing of this, Medtner is actually awakening the final missing piece of the opening introductory theme by using its left hand jumping chord idea in consecutive 16ths in diminution. The left hand however continues a descent down but for the first time it is with a *crescendo*, further harkening back to the final measures of the opening introduction where both hands move in contrary motion to open a texturally and emotionally expansive sound. At the peak, Example 11a m.3, the performer realizes the result of this motion by now playing the highest and lowest notes of the entire section. Medtner chooses to return to a full statement of the *forte risoluto* theme 3 for this climax, one which has been hinted at by the many fragments of it in this build up. This time however Medtner directs an *appassionato* allowing both performer and listener to finally give way to that extended emotional outpouring. A theme 3 melody that was once accompanied by the resolute *staccato* chords is now

accompanied by the sweeping arpeggiated left hand that has come to typify the most flowing and emotionally passionate moments. This short 4 measure theme is repeated again immediately after, just as in its original statement, but this time Medtner takes the sweeping left hand up into the treble range to invert the hands for its restatement. Like the emotion, the depth and weight of tone that has been carefully administered by the performer, and at times even slightly withheld to uphold the textual clarity and emotional meaning of many sections, is now given its full core sound with abandon. With the melody in the left hand in the lower register this sonority and depth of sound commands an authoritative approach that is very orchestral in its nature. What one may attribute to that of a cello, is perhaps even more akin to a horn or bass trombone with a song-like, projecting and unrelenting weight to each pitch.

With this lower register and the natural descent of the second half of the theme 3 material, Medtner still chooses to dissipate the emotional energy in this theme restatement. Indicating *poco a poco calmando e diminuendo*, he thins out the texture in the right hand, opting for a ‘non-resolute’ version of the theme 3 chords without *staccato* or accent, instead of the flowing 16ths *appassionato* previously used for the accompaniment. Rather Medtner uses those 16ths when at the registerally lowest point, a symmetry in-sync with that of one’s emotions caught in a nostalgic outbreak. It is amongst these extreme heights and depths of feeling that one gets trapped in if constantly in a struggle of ‘forgotten’ emotional memories. And thusly Medtner now uses the sweeping arpeggio 16ths at the end of that theme restatement in the right hand to begin to bring us back out of the emotional and registral depth, which we can see in Example 11b. Interestingly, seemingly at random but with impeccable flow, Medtner now cites the secondary theme from Example 4 for the left hand with the 16ths over top, as a brief link to the

final close of the Exposition. It is as if this theme has also felt the effects of this nostalgic journey, now iterated with a much darker, exhausted timbre and character.

Although at first ambiguous to the ear, and largely in part to Medtner's deceiving use of A-F# in the left hand, we are actually not in D major this time, but still in e minor. Thus, while with the aforementioned ear to the original statement of the secondary theme, the pianist must also keep the chief struggle and emotional exhaustion as their first order of attention. However, the lightening up of one's weight and articulation, particularly with the subtle buoyant bounce of the repeated notes creating an underlying dance, will still help threefold: In the clarity of the lower register; the rekindling of the former, yet now changed affect of the secondary theme; and preparing the ear and fingers for the next section.

Just as in its original secondary theme statement, the melodic pulse is now shortened in *stretto* via removing of the tie. This elision is utilized together with the same non-resolute chords from the previous theme interspersed as one of the four 16ths amidst its climb up. The seemingly subtle and simple rise is thus preparing us for a sublime, seamless link into a verbatim return of the opening introductory theme, now in e minor. With the numerous thematic quotes, transformations and motivic variations in the Sonata, the full statement of the introductory theme that closes the exposition provides an ideal structural and emotional anchor to the work thus far. Marked *pianissimo dolce* in contrast to the Sonata opening's *piano semplice*, it also provides a true recollection of where we began in this reminiscent journey, changed but with an air of tiredness and resignation, stronger for having learned from it, with even an air of joyful acceptance lurking beneath.



Example 12 – Development – Themes 4 and 5

(7)

Like the opening of the work without *ritardando* or *fermata*, Medtner closes the Exposition leaving the listener with harmonic resolve, yet with an emotional suspension and anticipation. So Medtner, purposefully startling the listener, dramatically juxtaposes this affect with a return to the passionate. This time however it is all the more outspoken and declamatory, what was previously pervaded by an overall sense of lyricism and calming down to the gentle *tranquillo* is now enlisted with the unique marking of *strepitoso*, literally meaning noisy. He uses this development both harmonically, structurally and emotionally as the eye of the storm amidst one's undying melancholy, culminating and releasing the cumulative energy of the brief outbursts that previously transpired.

Beginning with the same hand configuration and registral depth from before the return of the introductory theme, the thick chord spanning a 9th interval in the left hand signals a height of dissonance in this emotional outcry. One now hears an elongated theme 4 avoiding its resolving cadence and pulled out of the 9th chord, and further intensified by very chromatic treatment of the theme, compounding its unresolved nature. Adding to this is the thickest harmonic texturing in the right hand, together with the first notes played *forzando*. The Development opening is thus more than just a *rinforzando* idea after the introductory return, Medtner clearly wants a jagged *subito* approach, as if the first wave of a crashing tsunami. Similarly, the right hands' figuration is now developed from the transitory theme accompaniment. What was once a subtle

fragmentary rhythmic echo in this accompaniment, is now played as continuous 16ths aiding the consistent full texture and agitation, increasing the passionate flow of the left hand melody, and even more subtly providing a momentum and transitioning link to the right hand 16ths from the introductory theme.

While emotionally participating in the previous *tranquillo* to end the Exposition is important, so is its subtlety, thereby the pianist must wisely plan ahead for the immediate outburst of the Development. Thus the performer actually longs for a *fermata* before the double bar to both finish the previous affekt and to get one's mind and fingers prepared for the new section. Instead they must take the full length of the final eighth note as well as their own implied *poco ritenuto* to prepare for this. As soon as the finger plays that final note of the Exposition with the time needed for the greatest beauty of tone, they must instantly change gear, both mentally reawakening the emotional fervour to come, and physically re-strengthening the tips of the fingers and structural arch of the hand, preparing for the rhythmic *attaca* of the broken chords in the right hand. Furthermore, Medtner's *all'improvvisa* marking contrasting that of the previous and predictably patterned introductory theme's perpetual rhythmic *simplice*, must be at least somewhat preconceived, not unlike a jazz musicians' upcoming improvisatory solo, so as to give an organic connection to the outgoing material while the new material sounding natural and free.

Medtner intersperses this rapturing moment with a verbatim return to theme 5 in its original key of e minor. This theme is then dragged back into the Development's opening 'rapturesque' take on theme 4. This is structurally important however, as following an emotional and virtuoso climb up to end this transformation of theme 4, with a triplet 16ths rising arpeggio to peak at an unexpected D flat chord, and the left hand chord now spanning the interval of a

10th, Medtner takes the intermingled theme 5 and builds upon its urgency and chromaticism, with a new affekt and struggle of rise and fall.



Example 13 – Theme 5 and Transitory Theme

(7)

Fragmentary usage of the opening of theme 5's material in *risoluto* is now played in *stretto* driving the line and emotional agitation up even further. Yet Medtner once again chooses to immediately juxtapose this idea with a fragmentary *poco dolce* rekindling of the second half of the transitory theme's harmonic syncopated material. This undulating back-and-forth reinforces further the nostalgic, mental tug-of-war. It is here that Medtner now interrupts each theme material in a constantly building overall angst and developmental structure. Thus, a keen focus must fully identify the theme fragments and unique characters, and their inevitable transformations now ongoing.

The avid pianist may first practice separately each thematic idea in its own original character and form as first played in the piece. Second, they now play its transformative form in the development, comparing the two and coming up with their own unique take on its transformation. Finally, and likely most challenging, they play them as written, juxtaposed

immediately between themselves as in the development. This approach is to give one the greatest possibility in utilizing the full spectrum of their pianistic touch, emotional threshold and structural awareness. While some may find this a too extreme and fluctuating approach detrimental to the overall flow, they must be reminded that this clearly is in Medtner's realm of intention via his aforementioned score indications. A long phrase and organic flow has come to define this Sonata until this point, and it is now that Medtner deliberately fragments and breaks with this tradition to further the upheaval.

Medtner uses the fragmentary *poco dolce* syncopated chords as a continued phrase with its own miniature climax, each taking itself a step higher in sequence creating waves of anxiety. Yet this melodic line and fervour once again falls at every try. However, its final reach up is punctuated by an elongated chromatic descent in *calmando* to bring the textual and emotional temperature back down to begin a new episode.

Despite the Developments' initial rapture and overall improvisatory account it is interesting to take account of Medtner's formal composition in its exact execution. The rigorous *risoluto*, so disjoint from the *dolce*, and as in several other thematic entrances carried across bar lines so to further blur its literal measured text, it still makes an exact, complete 8 bar phrase. Even the chromatic elongated descent beginning on the offbeat in the previous measure which winds down the whole section is a 2+2+4 8 measure construction, despite the syncopation and circumvention of bar lines. This, obvious by now a trademark of Medtner, can also be seen as yet another trademark of the Sonata itself, in its 'perfect' discipline - the orderly, introductory theme both in phrase and motivic text, and even in the main themes that follow. As seen in many of his other compositions, he is not completely adverse to irregular bar groupings or phrase lengths in general, but here however he takes an always overriding traditional approach in this manner. It is

Medtner, in his originality of traditionalism that is subconsciously and consciously fighting his own battle with nostalgia, together with form and function as it pervades to music in his time.

It is not nearly enough then for the pianist to play through with passion taking into account all of Medtner's expressive markings. In Theme 5's original statement in the Exposition, with the grace notes came an air of sparkle in the finger tips to keep the overall texture and mood light, and to lend well to its lyrical consequent of the phrase. Now in the Development however after the first theme 5 statement, in Example 13 the consequent is an elongated fragment of syncopation, and the sparkle fingers of the antecedent phrase lend itself to an almost *marcato* utilization of the now *risoluto* rapid grace notes. Further to take into account is the register that you are in on the piano. Is one's interpretation through each sequence just as emotionally jarring as the previous? Medtner's reassertion of *risoluto* followed by *poco dolce* twice reaffirms this truth. Thereby the performer, while full of angst and anguish, boiling with different temperaments, must still plan ahead, as does Medtner, about each statements emotional hierarchy. It is therefore only in the final elongated peak and descent of the sequence that one can fully dissipate their energy in the finger tips, and even to a certain degree the level of depth of tone and weight transfer, all while maintaining a *molto legato* singing voiced line, so as not to allow the now exhaustive syncopated chordal pattern to interrupt Medtner's clear horizontal intent.



Example 14 – Developmental Episode 1

(8)

The return of horizontal lyricism brings the listener back home to their nostalgic indulgence in this Development episode. This is a mental reprise as it lies as a sublime homage to that emotional affekt which has pervaded the whole sonata until this point. Foreshadowing the rest of the Development, we have now chromatically descended to our lowest momentary resting place so far – to give breath to something new, free and without driven anguish, before the development begins its slow rise to a final climax.

Justifiably Medtner now chooses multiple themes concurrently as the central moment of the entire work. Theme 4's *meditamento* in an outspoken lyrical tenderness, overtop our first main theme after the introduction, Theme 2. As seen in Example 14, apparent is Medtner's return to *tranquillo* but this time with the added *espressivo* – no longer a *disinvolto* from the opening, and with an additional *poco marcato*. Medtner chooses to have this lyrical honesty and texture as the chief nostalgic weight and reminiscence in the work. He chooses this as the defining element of this Sonata, rightfully at its core and central point in the formal structure of the entire work. Therefore despite his formidable complexity through contrapuntal technique on display here, and in the many expressive markings, this is to be an all-encompassing, and overriding lyrical element of the Sonata thus far. And this is Medtner's vision – that despite the turmoil there is peace, beauty and a natural order in the struggle.

Coming from the long chromatic descent, giving way to its drooping nature in both affekt and physical technique, the hand and tips of the fingers must immediately re-strengthen to rekindle the deepest singing tone. Particularly while the opening left hand chord can continue as both the end and the beginning of two phrases, playing a subtle color of harmony, the right hand's high F however must pierce one's soul in its projection and beauty. Therefore the right hand's supportive hand arch – one which incorporates the peak of the knuckles at the index

finger – and resulting firm finger tips must be ready to achieve this peak of tonal beauty. This is further emphasized by accent and *poco marcato* making it equally interesting to see the role reversal of these two concurrent themes, as the left hand's Theme 2 has been characterized up until this point as strong, *concentrando* and a formidable reassertion from the opening introductory theme. Themes 2 and 4 now combine however for one unified *espressivo* affekt. Still, the pianist must be very aware of the instruments' innate treatment of register and texture. The typical decision remains here determining which theme and voice to bring out more. Rather, as in the affekt, they should both be treated along the same dynamic and emotional plane, but keeping in mind their register and adjusting accordingly. The right hand top voice that is automatically heard by most ears as the predominating voice must be slightly underplayed to give a clarity of text to the equally important Theme 2 in the left hand due to its lower register. This is compounded by the fact that Medtner also chooses to have the introductory theme 16th note pattern interwoven within the accompaniment figure of Theme 6, as the main harmonic texture atop the left hand melody. The performer must realize the resulting effect on the listener when presented with the many options of a multi-layered texture. While necessary as a start, only bringing out one voice or theme more than another as a blanket strategy for the entire section certainly does not account for the dual important and 'mixed nostalgic memories' thematic nature of each phrase, as it is logically and physically impossible to be completely accurate in this. One's ears are selective when presented with so many options, therefore so must the performer's plan be. As Medtner indicates as well, the accentuation of the opening of the Theme 4 statements in the right hand is a clear example of this. One must decide which notes of each theme carry their respective phrases allowing the listener's ear to subconsciously complete the connection between the notes which are brought out versus those which are purposefully behind

the layer of the other theme. Furthermore, while listening with the utmost discretion is always the chief concern, the performer can further plan ahead by knowing when the longer note values or sustained notes exist within each theme, carefully and subtly allowing the other theme to shine through during these moments.



Example 15 – Developmental Episode 2

(9)

While the listener has been temporarily transported away amidst Development Episode 1, they are now subtly but noticeably shifted back into Medtner's pervading emotional unrest. Medtner uses the texture created by the accompaniment figure of the left hand from Theme 6, and while it finishes the previous phrase it moves slightly upward to organically link the beginning of the Developmental Episode 2. As clearly stated in his indication of *poco a poco agitato e piu mosso* in Example 15, he is now using this accompanimental figure as the vehicle for the unrelenting, slowly approaching fervour that now begins.

While the first episode began in a rather isolated approach in both texture and emotional affekt, starting in Episode 2 and providing it with this textural Theme 6 link, Medtner is reasserting the organically flowing nature of the entire work. To compound this, it is now used in both hands beneath a very sporadic, varied and spliced Theme 4 idea in the right hand, with even

a subtlety of Theme 5's pickup 16th note rhythmic gesture. The nostalgic utopia now quickly breaking apart in their mind, its focus is lost amidst the quickly returning ambiguous agitation.

Medtner's other markings however, *sempre legatissimo e poco pedale*, and *una corda*, tell the performer that we are not back to the emotional temperature where we started this Development. The 16th note texture is still marked *pianissimo* however coming out of the previous affekt. The vigilant interpreter only notices a *poco a poco crescendo* nearly 10 measures later. Therefore, it beckons another opportunity to create a unique textural aura in the sound. Medtner is now mysteriously, even ethereally emerging from the grounded, peaceful affekt from before. And in linking fashion, the even sporadic elements from the Theme over top must pierce through this fog like at the outset of the Development Episode 1. It is also interesting to note Medtner's specific usage of the 16ths, as in looking at Example 15, every two measures in either hand drives upwards in scale-like motion together with a small *crescendo* before starting the next motivic pattern. With each subsequent phrase of repeated material starting higher in sequence, the emotional temperature is another terrace higher. Each two bar rise up then also typifies the agitation and struggle within the mind and heart in a most compact way from where the listener has come throughout all themes thus far. This constant peaceful-rise-fall approach is now so condensed to suggest a truly restless and desperate nature, even at this most deceptively humble of beginnings.

As pianist, there must also be an immediate mental and physical switch into this next Episode 2. Very important to observe are Medtner's comma markings in both the right and left hand at the end of the measure immediately preceding the new Episode. This provides the necessary time and energy to recollect one's thoughts, hands and heart from the previous indulgence. Still, the performer must be careful in not stopping the aforementioned organic 16th

note linking pattern completely. Therefore the ending of the Episode 1 phrase, while the right hand Theme 4 melody comes to a gentle close, the left hand linking 16ths can now be brought out delicately, articulating them with greater clarity with a lifting of the finger while the weight is still transferred between each note through *legato*. This serves as the aural link for the listener to the next Episode and also subtly begins the necessary physical technique that is needed *poco a poco* in the following texture as it slowly climbs upward.

a. *p subito, tenebroso*
legatissimo
una corda

b. *p*
Leg. *Leg.*

c. *poco marcato*
5

d. *p*
cresc.

Example 16 – Development Episode 3, Variation

(9, 10)

With each successive climb up, just as the driving left hand patterns move us together with the right hand's octave leaps and its following Theme 4 excerpts, Medtner is giving reason and result to already climax in this sequence. Two measures before the beginning of the 3rd Developmental Episode Medtner reaches a *forte*, a long way from the *pianissimo* and *poco a poco crescendo* only 4 measures ago. Yet both the listener and performer is fully aware this cannot be his ultimate goal, as just in the past we are immediately brought back down with the Theme 6 accompaniment pattern spun out in a way to dissipate the emotional energy. And while

there is no *diminuendo*, but rather a *marcato* in the left hand, the contrary motion in both hands foregoing the driving up pattern, together with downwards octave displacement gives a sense of strength yet with an air of emotional fatigue. Medtner's usage of *piano subito, una corda* to start the next Developmental Episode 3 in Example 16a is then as much expected as it is a surprise. Nearly identical indications to the beginning of the previous episode, it is as if Medtner starts over. Still, with a change in thematic texture together with *sempre con moto* the performer is aware of its heightened intensity and direction. Short excerpts and phrases punctuated with commas are now completely gone with Medtner introducing the 3rd highly developed statement of the iconic Introductory Theme 1 in the right hand. He continues the accompanimental Theme 6 idea in the left hand but now moves very slowly upward in the most chromatic language, and further condensed in each statement. When Medtner takes previous 8 bar phrases to make them only 4 in this Development, he now has brought each fleeting rise up to only a 2 bar statement before it restarts. These short musical attempts at the climb create a now embedded uneasy feel in both listener and performer throughout. One must always keep in mind however the ultimate goal for each section, as despite these 2 bar 'moanings' Medtner once again makes the phrase much longer in its rise and fall. Thereby, despite the likewise murmuring, rumbling, creeping nature of the left hand as well – upon countless examinations as a listener, and the most necessary as performer, one must realize it is actually the exact same structure of the opening Introductory Theme 1 *simplice*.

It is therefore how Medtner's continual reliance on the fall and its following *diminuendo*, and the written out, almost eerie trill have a purpose. Medtner is showing to what extent the opening Theme has been mutated in this journey. In this Development nothing is what it seems anymore, but rather it is all in a stirring pot as one's emotional memories also come to a boil,

ready to burst. To take the music and the Developmental climb that next level Medtner doubles this intensity by an octave displacement in the right hand and doubling the Theme 1 material in the left hand with the melodic notes on the second 16th note of every group, as seen in Example 16 b. This double strike of the Introductory Theme 1 melody between right and left hand creates an insistence on this almost drone like melody, increasing the agitation. This time however, in what was always a symmetric rise and fall after the first 2 measures in the Introductory Theme 1 pattern, Medtner chooses to extend the Theme's rise up – finally signaling to the listener that the emotional push is ready to take off.

Further attention by the pianist must be paid to the repeated thematic notes between the hands. As the right hand's melodic notes are on the main beats the listener can pick up this continuity on their own. With a deep singing tone the left hand's pronouncement of Theme 1 off the beat in a newly sonorous tenor range provides something new pushing the listener always rhythmically ahead. And despite their syncopated injection, they must be further emphasized beyond the right hand as each note is an increased push upwards via *tenuto* articulation.

What was first a typical 8 bar phrase of the Theme 1 statement as seen in Example 16a, Medtner has elongated with the extended rise into a 12 bar phrase which is seen beginning in both hands in Example 16b. However, Medtner is clearly insistent on the nagging, melancholy nature of the listener's mindset by now. Despite the Theme 1 growth and elongation, and the agitation and further drive up of the peak Theme 1's phrase, he yet again chooses to fall and even *diminuendo* back to where we started. The listener and the heart of the journey certainly must be at odds with itself at this point, its inability to break free of this emotional descent. In Example 16c Medtner therefore starts up the material from Example 15. This time however the Theme 4's opening sustained note is reinforced in chordal treatment in the right hand suggesting a larger

approach, but at the same time this also results in losing the 16th note pattern, thinning out the texture further. Medtner even chooses to *diminuendo* further down from this point in the subsequent two bar phrases – it is as if to the listener the unsatisfying momentary peak of the previous Theme 1 section was the height of it all. Just as he now drops back down the octave to start Example 16c, so does he further drop another octave at the end of the *diminuendo*, taking us back to our original *pianissimo* marking at the beginning of the climb three measures before Example 16d. However, we have already immediately started the climb back up to *piano* thanks to the dual hand rising up motive from Example 15.

It is this *piano* followed by the first full *crescendo* that Medtner asserts the entire melodic Theme 4 fragment that we heard beginning in Example 15 repeated immediately every 2 measures, this time without the 2 bar descent. A real *crescendo* (no longer a musical ‘hairpin’ or *poco a poco*) now giving rise and hope to the listener and vigilant performer of the real arrival that may finally transpire at the end of it. Thus Medtner chooses this right hand Theme 4 elongated fragment and takes it up the a minor triad with each successive 2 bar entrance. Overtop a static *ostinato* rumbling in the left hand’s 16th note Theme 6 pattern, with the iconic nature of the right hand’s thematic material that must keep falling in the 2nd measure of the 2 bar grouping, Medtner chooses this final moment with each entrance to keep trying harder, reaching higher and insisting on its character finally with its last and highest 2 bar statement a reinforced descent in 6ths.

a. *molto cresc. e allargando*

b. *ms! m.f.*

c. *piu mosso, quasi cadenza (accelerando)*

con forza

non legato

Example 17 – Developmental Climax

(10)

It is now through this terraced rise that Medtner chooses to broaden the momentum that has accumulated thus far. What was always a consistent 16th note continuous texture is now interestingly being slowed through Medtner's *allargando* seen in Example 17a. It is as if he is still not ready to reach the penultimate moment of this Development. However, he has taken us back up the octave through the use of the terraced rise up a triad, and now, as seen in Example 17a also takes the 6th interval continuing into a dramatic rolled chordal effect in the right hand. This serves both as an emotional outlet amidst the end of this 2 page build up, but at the same time paradoxically dissipates the rhythmic momentum in tandem with the *allargando*. An expansive show of strength and emotional fortitude, the avid musician realizes this is no random outburst but a controlled, *risoluto* character as seen from the first dramatic statement of this material, which was the driving force behind Theme 3 in the left hand. With the right hand Medtner chooses to remain constant, insistent on the accentuated high C. Still, the line is always moving, and the pianist must subtly be attuned to the chromatic descending lines in both hands.

It is fitting for the always pervading chromaticism in this Development, and the duality in its drooping nature throughout the whole Sonata, that it once again does both together to bring in the real climax. As seen in Examples 16d, 17a and 17b Medtner descends from a low bass E down to an E flat to start the official descent down to a B, as the dominant of E. It is at this low B that we get the Development's return to rapture and flourish as whence it began. This rapid arpeggio up is as much a propelling forward as it is a culmination of the broken *allargando* chords together with the rising 16ths left hand pattern, and further imitates that arpeggiated material which begins the second statement of the melody in Theme 3 an octave higher. It is throughout this rapidity that we get an abrupt and the only complete stop to the 16th motion. Instead of using this arpeggio to begin another theme immediately, as in the beginning of the Exposition through Theme 3, Medtner uses this instead justifiably as the means to deliver a large perfect cadence in E, but the E bass instead now made to be a 2nd inversion A minor chord, truly setting up the final push back to the Recapitulation's home key.

The authoritative Theme 2 character material comes to the forefront now in Example 17c. Despite Theme 2's subtle, singing rekindling in the utopia of Development Episode 1, since then Medtner used its motivic patterns only like the accompanimental patterns of Theme 6. They have been spread throughout the entire developmental build-up as one of the chief vehicles of movement until this point, but it is now finally used simultaneously as both accompanimental figure and its original thematic form.

While the large cadential movement and Medtner's markings of *con forza*, *piu mosso quasi cadenza*, *accelerando* announce an arrival, the pianist must still be ever vigilant, planning ahead. Building upon the momentum beginning with the large rolled chordal *allargando*, the 64ths arpeggio up is the precursor to the expansive arpeggio beginning on the low E's to start the

Theme 2 material in a final push. Extremely insistent on his accentuation in this section throughout, this is a clear indication of Medtner's desire to now hold nothing back in depth and sound. Yet that very depth must be always refined to its purest character and emotional intention, integrity and transparency. The accents are on every chord further reinforcing the character of the very first statement of Theme 2, and while implying a consistent *marcato* approach, it is Medtner asking for emphasis and declamation in each chord, rather than angularism and roughness for the sake of volume. While one may argue that this roughness is justified at the end of such a buildup of tension and missed climaxes, they must equally be reminded of its always singing, tender thematic lines throughout – its purist, and leanest of means in expression, never just for effect. Thus the performer applies weight and strength to each chord but always with an ear to where it is phrased, where its final goal is to be reached. Here, just as in the highly contrapuntal Developmental Episode 1, one must also choose what they want the listener to hear most, carefully considering which thematic ideas and notes will automatically sound themselves clearly given the texture and register. As such this climax stands out as an anomaly in its simultaneity in pronouncing one thematic (Theme 2) material in both hands at the same time. And since we have heard the accompanimental Theme 2 idea throughout this entire developmental climb it's safe to assume to listener continue this in their ear while the full realization of the theme in the right hand is unrelentingly brought out just as Medtner clearly intends. Fittingly, this final push is driven that much more by Medtner's indications, bringing the listener full-circle to the *all' improvvisa* (Example 12) jarring opening to the Development versus the now *quasi cadenza* drama and passion, but also back to the main opening of the entire work in the *concentrando* Theme 2. This all-encompassing language uses the consequent phrase of Theme 2 thereafter to open up in contrary motion, still accentuated and thickening the texture

with chords in both hands for the final push into the two arpeggios concluding the Development. The first arpeggio is stopped abruptly, one final hesitation, but now these arpeggios together with Medtner's third *allargando*, suggest a true peak in breadth and strength that intentionally spills over in returning to its verbatim statement of Theme 2 in *forte* to start the Recapitulation proper, foregoing the introductory theme entirely.



Example 18 – Recapitulation m.25 – Theme 7 (11)

It is interesting to consider Medtner's inclusion of an entirely new theme amidst a fully repeated Recapitulation material. Medtner chooses to have all themes in their original keys from their original statement, thereby the listener likely expecting each subsequent thematic entrance to remain the same. Yet his decision is to go directly from the Secondary theme idea in D major (see Example 4) marked *lusingando*, playful, to this completely new theme, with a similar affect than all previous themes, seen in Example 18. The Secondary Theme is now morphed into a delicate, singing, dancing fragmented utopian theme. Still, the listener is ever aware of the tendency and feeling of positive energy to subside into the emotional turmoil and spiral that begins in the following Transitory thematic section (Example 5). Where the listener was taken aback to this melancholy twice over already in the Exposition, this third time Medtner takes the cadence in D major and chooses to finally continue to where the listener thought they were first heading to. The D major cadence together with the comma at the end of the Secondary Theme

adds a momentary suspense as to its proceedings, but is now finally the dominant of the new G major Theme 7 seen in Example 18.

That which has become the language of the Sonata to this point, Medtner here is using previous materials to create something that feels entirely new. With the alternating, syncopated rhythmical idea this creates the subtle dance together with the singing left hand, an approach which can be seen as directly taken from the first Exposition climax in the Transitory Theme Extension, Example 9. Structured by an undeniable rise and fall throughout its 4 bar phrase, it is starting a completely new theme while simultaneously creating a noticeable but subtle homage to the Transitory Theme which was expected here, as well as linking us with the previous Secondary theme through more than just its joyful character. The syncopated idea gives way to the alternating falling pattern in the consequent phrase in the right hand. Furthermore, the left hand's rise up reminds the listener of nearly every rise up at the beginning of all the main themes, that after the two bar static motion, the opening introductory thematic idea proceeds upwards scale-wise, just as Theme 2 does in its consequent phrase and Theme 3 does right at its inception. So then does this rise up do just the same, using the first D as a linking note from the previous low bass D's cadential note, in fact even striking a rhythmic balance in its usage of eighth notes, between all the note values that can be seen if considering the pulse which the scale-like motion provides in the previous Themes. After this rise, the following intricate rhythmical repeated note in the left hand is utilized in the same way, both taken directly from the previous Secondary D major Theme's consequent phrase as linkage material, but also developed to great length as during the whole climb up in the preceding Development.

The now obvious elements between the entire Sonata, including the Secondary Theme just played and this new theme are plentiful, yet the pianist must differentiate them entirely. This,

in some ways like that of the sublime musical ‘aside’ qualities of the Developmental Episode 1, is material that must feel entirely refreshing, entirely new to the listener. The depth of one’s touch in the most sonorous area of the instrument must be as deep and *legato* and dynamically shaped as possible. The aforementioned immediate climb up signals a new voice and memory amidst the constant confusion, a tender outcry and question literally and figuratively rising above this otherwise always pervading nostalgic turmoil. At the same time the specific articulation of the right hand gives that sense of buoyancy, the light step of the dance, imitated by the left hand after its rise up. Therefore, the two approaches between the hands to start the theme could not be more different. What may feel to the pianist as lacking a passionate intensity for the first time in the accompanimental and 16ths motivic idea is intentional – its sporadic approach like that of a dancing inquisitive child or even curiously suggestive, but caressing playful, carefree touch of a loved one.

a.

b.

c.

Example 19 – Theme 7 Extension

(12)

Fittingly Medtner takes these character juxtapositions between the hands a step further. Immediately following the first 4 bar phrase he now repeats the opening of the Theme 7 phrase by inverting the hands, with added syncopated chords below the melody in the right hand, alto voice, mimicking the left hand. This thickening of texture together with this long sustained melody which starts Theme 7, on top of the rich chords in both hands, now opens up to create the sound of a choir filling a cathedral. Medtner removes the *portamento* articulation for the off-beat chords, further increasing the overall sustaining effect and reinstating the initial *cantando* indication. The result of this subtle but important change in affekt creates a further momentary pause and recollection, like the musical ‘aside’, and one further reinforced by the following *poco ritenuto*.

This *poco ritenuto* therefore plays a dual role, it emphasizes the held chorale approach of the theme and its subtle giving-way to the drive and direction, to instead revel in the aura of the sound and singing tone. It also serves, as in Medtner’s compositional language, a written out comma thereby giving the listener time to realize where they are, recollect where they have been, before moving on to something new. It is then that Medtner begins another climb at the *a tempo* seen in Example 19, with techniques used in the Exposition and Development, he takes motives and fragments to build upon them in *stretto* and sequential pattern. This time Medtner starts even further back at the dynamical level of *pianissimo*, as the recently stated theme was already *piano* in character and sound. Fragmenting the repeated note idea together with the consequent of the Theme 7 phrase, Medtner literally and figuratively spins as if unsure whether to go up or down. The consequent of the theme phrase going downwards, he continually picks it right back up and then does it again in sequence a step higher, each successive entrance building until a point where he yet again must give in to the inevitable fall. Most interesting to note between this next

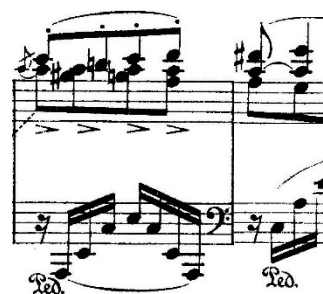
chapter of the struggle between rise and fall, is Medtner's subtle inclusion of a left hand seemingly all new but actually directly linked with that which immediately preceded this section in the Secondary Theme. The coincidental mimicking of the up-and-down direction in both hands, is thus as coincidental as it is deliberate. While its arpeggiated back-and-forth nature has been employed in different ways in Exposition climaxes as well as subtly in the original accompanimental pattern of Theme 4, it is interesting to note that it is really only being developed in the Recapitulation. This left hand remains while Medtner proceeds to further splice the Theme 7 in *stretto* and sequential technique, now leaving only the repeated note motivic idea as the chief driving force, played in succession. Medtner drops the octave and tries again before finally giving way in a most unexpected manner. As seen in Example 19c, a sudden yet singing rise up a fourth interval played in thirds and falling thereafter is echoed by the left hand and spun out into a trill connecting right into the previously missing Transitory Thematic section, which as in the Exposition, should have come after the D major cadence at the end of the Secondary Theme. These fresh motivic gestures serve to awaken the ear amidst the all-too-familiar spiral of alternating note 16ths patterns that happened before. Even more astutely, they serve to foreshadow that which is to come again midway through the following Transitory Thematic section in the left hand melody, the sustained note before its eventual fall. Furthermore, the trill is also awakened, while seemingly displaced here it is actually the material used as the chief linking idea between phrases in the Introductory Theme, the very first connecting idea by Medtner that's also seen in the heart of the Development.

a.



Example 20 – Transitory Thematic Extension 2

b.



(13)

With the elongated new Theme 7 followed by the trill, we now see the previously omitted Transitory Thematic Section. This time however, contrary to beginning on the dominant key of A minor as in the section's original Exposition statement, Medtner chooses to start on the dominant of C major, as scale degrees 3-2-1 in C major are spelled out in the linking trill descending into the G7 chord. However, as is the nature of this harmonically searching section, beginning on C major only requires Medtner to proceed in sequence until he reaches his desired destination. The destination arrives even more ambiguously in a large rolled A7 chord to begin the final climax in this work. As seen in Example 20, Medtner now suddenly with the pronouncement of the broken chord signals a new arrival. This immediately builds upon that which began in the Transitory Thematic section as in the same vein as the preliminary climax in the Exposition, seen in Example 9. A much higher sense of urgency and passion is evident in the large gestural chord, with its brighter sonority hinted at in the brief A major dominant flavoring, largely contrasting to the always falling, drooping minor affect. The height of this sudden influx of emotional fervour is compounded by the sheer amount of musical lines and thematic elements within all the concurrently moving voices.

This final build up in the Recapitulation further condenses the motivic language which has defined the Sonata throughout. When viewing Example 20a together with the score, seeing

the two bar rise and fall which is then extended one measure to a three bar phrase, with an added further extension repeat of the final measure to create a 4 bar phrase, Medtner is not only condensing the overall structure of the Transitory Thematic Section, but also that of the whole work. Ongoing but veiled within this outburst is the ever pervading rise and fall nature and struggle in the entire piece, that which is so apparent but also so easy to dismiss amidst the thick texture. While continuing the fabric of syncopated agitations from the linking transitory section in the alto voice, it is suddenly arriving at a *forte* dynamic after only a one measure *crescendo*. Similar to its climax in the Exposition, the sudden simultaneity of the rise and fall thematic idea in contrary motion between both hands is immediately asserting. Despite this theme and its many permeations in each successive theme and their development, Medtner chooses to rekindle this in this final climax. Similarly, in what was a provoking dialogue in the transitory section both in the Exposition and the immediately linking previous section between the hands, is now an opening up in expression, no longer a nostalgic questioning but a call to embrace its abundance and wealth of expression, a journey that has seemingly arrived.

Marked *sempre espressivo e legato*, this does not ready the performer for what the passage truly entails. The emotional temperature here is reinforced by the weight of the hand through the fingers' weight transfer of the *legato*. The sustain pedal here is also treated as such – while one can argue its level of usage in delicate and even dance-like thematic ideas throughout the work, even in the previous transitory section to keep the clarity of the textures and syncopations as priority, a generous pedalling is now required as the dual scalar thematic patterns are in duet-like song. Still, the always pervading chromaticism does not allow the pianist to administer this in a passive approach, rather being particularly vigilant on the level of sound saturation and blending that they require. Furthermore, in the work's always arching, long

phrases, as much as this is a reawakening of passion it is still, yet another beginning. To aid in this clarity versus lavishness approach, the voicing becomes paramount in each thematic fragment brought out between the hands. For example, when studying the patterns of the 4 bar phrase the 3 note rise followed by leap downwards is first stated in the left hand in measure 2 before it is played in a dual role in measure 3. This attention to detail within the writing greatly defines the performer's own attention in their multifaceted pedalling and voicing, always keeping in mind its forward direction.

The direction is suddenly catapulted forward at the outset of this building climax, and thus, despite the lack of indication by Medtner as previously stated, only playing with an expressive legato does not differentiate it from its numerous predecessors. Therefore with the new dynamic and cascading wave-like gestures that suddenly take hold, the *rubato*, momentum, even one's internal *tempo* can be increased subtly to nudge the listener into that affekt, driving them to Medtner's eventual goal at Example 20b. Therefore amidst the arching thematic and motivic ideas from where we started, each 4 bar phrase still ends with a downward resolution echoed by the left hand, citing a seemingly long way to go before that peak. Medtner even repeats in sequence the same phrase a step lower immediately after the first 4 bar phrase, so despite the sections' increased fervour, he is still paying homage to a nostalgic melancholy further insisted upon with each left hand fragmentary repeated motive, a journey still passionate but unable to break free. Compounded by a *diminuendo* at the end of the second phrase one soon begins to feel this outburst just as temporary and 'unsuccessful' as the numerous tries before.

Following this double 4 bar statement however, Medtner instead elides the original 4 bar phrase, choosing just the 1st bar as a motivic pattern in *stretto* to begin the final climb upwards. This is further aided by his marking, *poco affretando e crescendo molto*. Meaning to hurry, the

pianist is now fully aware of the exertion of his remaining energies. The importance of the previous *diminuendo* paramount in its execution, the pianist must emerge out of the quiet lurking depths, as they have many times before, perhaps even further accentuating its lowest point by a subtle relinquishing of *tempo* here, but this time with this final adrenaline push to break free. With tension seemingly a word of caution amongst every performing artist, it is this inherent tension that must exist within the artist to achieve the true emotional language that is intended. Practically speaking, while certainly not pushing beyond the logical point of result nor tensing the muscles uncontrollably, certain degrees of this tension will, and must always exist in such a passage. Therefore each artist only works to balance the level at which they can achieve both, with the importance of the music's voice always of the highest order.

Compounding in each step to a higher level of urgency, Medtner's *crescendo molto* marking is curiously also supported by a 2 bar musical 'hairpin' *crescendo* leading to a *fortissimo allargando* in the measure preceding Example 20b. Here one sees the evolution of Medtner's *allargando* – an indication that has been so often used to dissipate the emotional energy, is now used in the exactly opposite way. Medtner broadens this final measure before the climax allowing the performer and listener to breathe into this well-deserved exhale and emotional outpouring. What was a 2 bar rise and fall, Medtner has now elongated an additional four measures of only the rise before final giving us a one measure 'fall' into the climax of Example 20b. This fall in the motivic pattern is further foiled in its typical emotional nature by the left hand's accentuated rising thirds and *portamento* articulation leading into the Example 20b right hand. The cumulative effect, as first foreshadowed in the Expositions transitory climax, gives hope to 'the rise' becoming the dominant affekt, finally breaking free from 'the fall' and its ever holding grasp on the listener's reminiscing psyche. It is in his iconic motivic fashion, with

the chromatic and accentuated, almost pedantic *marcato* chords in the right hand does Medtner rise up, breaking free from descent by continuing this rise through the bar line. Utilizing the arpeggiated accompaniment pattern to typify the height of emotion, Medtner breaks the agitated pulsating eighths pattern at this point to rekindle the lost, passionate, arpeggiated 16ths reminiscent of all its previous attempts. Subtle in their inclusion, the 16ths still off the downbeat further move the listener forward, while still keeping an air of agitation. Furthermore the grace note, used in Medtner's compositional idiosyncrasies in the thematic material and in this section throughout, that is now seen here as a variation of the repeated note 16th's pattern from the Development in Theme 5, is now at its apex, becoming the very downbeat of the climax – a far removal and evolution from its beginnings as only a rhythmic descending, subtly dancing device. It must be played just as reinforced, broadening and expressive as the rest – a feat even further emphasized 4 measures later as the grace note leads to an expressive accent and *tenuto* on a final high A.

At first glance, Medtner appears to descend immediately again after this climax. The rising pattern across the bar line is immediately elided into a 3 note rising pattern that begins its statement each time successively lower until the soaring *tenuto* note, below which the line further descends, also in *tenuto* by scale. What may seem as an altogether unrelenting obsession with descent, is however rather the opposite, as Medtner now maintains the emotional intensity of the climax. And it is this 'descent' (used in quotations, as it is now one in pitch only), that balances out the elongated climb which began at the outset of the Recapitulation's Transitory section and continued at the beginning of the climb in Example 20a-b. Medtner's literal peak of the climax lasts less than two measures, but he chooses the descending three note elision thereafter to move to another octave displacement of the climax material (Example 20b) an

octave lower. It is on this next statement of the climax material that Medtner now splices even these three notes into two. Reaching the climax statement an octave lower (4 measures after Example 20b) Medtner also marks *piano subito crescendo* over the final two ascending notes using this as his next propelling fuel upwards. Unified with Medtner's contrapuntal language, the climb right back up increases the texture by including even more thematic content simultaneously with the climax motive. The right hand now playing chords on the off beats amidst the singular notes rising up, this is reminiscent of the off-beat agitated eighths which permeate much of the work. A final *allargando* this time over two measures tells the pianist that this peak is even larger. Accentuated by a low E octave in the bass on the repeated note 16th pattern from Theme 5 in combination with *fortissimo* and the right hand, one now plays in octaves in between its alternating chords as seen in Example 21a m.1.

The image displays three musical excerpts from a piano work by Medtner. Excerpt 'a.' is titled 'Poco maestoso' and features a right hand with a *ff* (fortissimo) dynamic and a left hand with an *espress.* (espressivo) marking. Excerpt 'b.' is titled 'leggerissimo' and shows a right hand with a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic. Excerpt 'c.' is titled 'meno mosso, ma poco a poco danzando e a tempo' and features a right hand with a *p* (piano) dynamic. The excerpts are arranged in three separate systems, each with its own staff and key signature.

Example 21 – a. Climax, Theme 4

(13, 14)

b. Bridge

c. Theme 6

The finality of the low accentuated E's sound to the heart the final return to A minor. This is a home key return where one might expect a resounding statement of one of the main

beginning Themes 1, 2 or 3 and not a full statement of the *meditamento* Theme 4. Yet Medtner does exactly that, and it is through his use of continuing the accentuated octave in the left hand, as a tonic pedal, together with the Theme's completely changed affekt – from *meditamento* to *maestoso* - that one feels the finality of it all. Each subsequent phrase of Theme 4's statement is now 'reinforced' by Medtner's marking of *rinforzando* together with the bass A octave drone at the outset of the phrase, and also by a three note rising up *crescendo* pattern into the octaves clearly linking directly with the previous climax a short while ago. It is only in the final phrase of Theme 4 preceded by a short *diminuendo*, just as in the Exposition, does a 7th interval at the beginning mark the change to Medtner's *piano espressivo*.

By now, exhausted from the tidal waves of climaxing emotional and technical fervour, both listener and pianist can be overwhelmed by any future undertaking. The music helps in this cause by once again calming into the thin, quiet transparency that has typified much of the work. However completely forgoing one's own physical fortitude would be in grave error. Theme 4's dramatic statement moments ago carries over the intensity of the climax while slowly dissipating the energy and firmness in one's tone and technique, and overall level of tension. Clearly still singing and passionate in its own accord through his *piano espressivo* in the final Theme 4 phrase, one's depth of touch and flexibility must be as keen as ever.

However, the illusory nature of it all now, caught up within such climaxes amidst Medtner's complete 'tossed salad' Recapitulation of themes and their developmental evolution, gives rise to the final series of events. What we expect as the final Theme 5 statement to follow, rather is presented with the exemplary definition of 'illusory' – a bridge-like 32nd note flourish developing from the accompanimental pattern of Theme 4 into a *pianissimo leggerissimo* seen in Example 21b, completely void of any thematic material for the first time. The *leggerissimo*

bridge passage requires an altogether new approach in this Sonata. Much in the language of his romantic predecessors with influences from Chopin, and taken that much further in the music of the French Impressionists, Medtner is using this fluttering passage also as an aura of sound to create that ambiguous, ethereal affekt. This is seen in many instances throughout the breadth of his entire works, including the end of the very next piece in the set, the *Danza Grazioso*, which is taken directly from here. A further symmetry can even be seen from the previously mentioned *Sonata Tragica* in the Op. 39 *Forgotten Melodies*, with its colorful, atmospheric section before the final build up into the coda. Here however in the *Sonata Reminiscenza*, the deep tone and singing is suddenly completely absent, with the pedal creating a wash of sound throughout. Still, the fingers must always be firm at the tip, the 32nd notes highly articulate to create a sparkle through the sustain of the pedal and the resulting harmonic color. Finally, the improvisatory *quasi-cadenza* nature of such a passage requires a supple freedom in direction and *tempo rubato*, as well as dynamic shaping so as to completely dispel any notions of playing a technical passage in and of itself.

Despite new technique encountered at the *leggierissimo*, its brilliance in articulation and sound is well prepared and foreshadowed by both its motivic pattern and coloristic *disinvolto* right from the opening of the work. Anchoring this passage are the 16th note patterns reminiscent in Theme 4, but they are also ideas of a theme to come. So also, just as the octave drones anchored the Theme 4 climax, so does it now in the dominant, E. The E drone now grounding this passage played with the left hand roughly every 2 quarter beats beginning in Example 21b, and realising its final E in Example 21c as the first note of a return to Theme 6 in a new affekt.

The sparkling improvisatory nature gives way naturally to the slowly growing, dancing, *danzando* Theme 6 restatement, now highly varied. Completely forgoing the descending

alternating note 16th pattern from its first statement in the Exposition, and which originated in Theme 2, Medtner now puts the Theme in the left hand with the syncopated chordal idea from the transitory section giving it its rhythmic impulse. This logical next step from its successive reductions in previous sections gives way to this new interpretation and affect as a dance. Subtly also foreshadowed by the newness of Theme 7's *giocosso* near the outset of the Recapitulation, this Theme 6 'restatement' therefore sounds almost completely new due to its character. Still, miniature swells in the left hand with the right hand's agitation makes the listener know there is something lurking beneath. Compared to this, the completely free of thematic obligation and nostalgic reminiscence of the preceding *leggierrissimo* bridge is far removed from this Theme's underpinnings. In the right hand the similarly dynamic *crescendo* and *diminuendo* shaping together with its increase and decrease in the amount of notes in each syncopated *agitato* chord coincide with this, further outlining the fact we all know by this point – that this still is the same world of nostalgia, only briefly departing through its merging with the bridge. It is thus also another unique device by Medtner to begin anew, another brief moment of emotional rest amidst the turmoil, another beginning from which to climb slowly into despair. And rightfully so, that as it builds time and time again, just as it does to Theme 6 in the Exposition – by eliding and fragmenting the theme in *stretto* spinning around in a trap of emotion over top a flowing introductory thematic language (see Score page 6 line 2), so does Medtner build here in the same way, underneath the ever intensifying and expanding right hand syncopated chords.





Example 22 – Conclusion

(14, 15)

The now unending dizzying spiral of emotional nostalgia is thus brought to its logical realization in this final conclusion. What was most recently demonstrated motivically is now done thematically as Medtner gives a final concise glimpse into the mind of a melancholic reminiscence. As the result of the previous build up, just as in the aforementioned initial statement in the Exposition, the peak now iterates the Theme 4 sustained note motivic idea as the chief expressive element. Opting to continue the thematic material in the left hand, carried over from the previous Theme 6 rearrangement, Medtner now states this thematic material without its typical Theme 4 cadential pattern or its Developmental 16th note repeated pattern. He instead chooses a variation upon the main climax of the piece most recently studied, seen in Example 20b. This subtle change both outlines the organic growth out of the previous climax while helping to change completely the affekt which just transpired in the dance-like variation of Theme 6. It further links the listener to the long, singing, exhaustive melodies which have come to typify many of the Sonata's Themes, particularly that of the opening Themes 1-4. Thus using Theme 4 together with this altered, smooth melodic thirds pattern in the upper voice organically links to the past and continues to develop the future. This multi-textured right hand therefore further outlines this duality in its cascading, spinning, constant 16th note pattern reminiscent of the opening theme while its bottom voice continues to spirally descend, constantly mimicking that of the left hand's Theme 4.

Of particular interest here is Medtner's usage of contrary motion throughout, together with matching phrase lengths. So as he announces this current peak as a two bar phrase across bar lines, the next two bar miniature starts off again an elided version of the Theme in *stretto* to achieve a higher goal – climbing upwards by step until reaching its final destination. Thus after the initial 2 bar peak, the following two successive 1 bar phrases climb upwards until reaching again a higher peak of a longer 2 bar phrase, although important to consider this is still one scale degree lower. Therefore the overall phrase is symmetrical, but more importantly the overall phrase structure becomes a nearly symmetrical pacing to the following phrase – Theme 5 restated in its entirety (Example 8), with its short-long, short-short-long phrases, particularly in the consequent phrase leading into the return of the varied Theme 2 in the Exposition.

Hence, we now see a true returning of all which began, in theme and structure. A final announcement each of the respective themes in their original form which one had expected much earlier within the Recapitulation. It is thus, as he proceeds in the Exposition that Medtner continues with the varied Theme 2, (Example 8, *forte*) in its expansive, soaring version, its passionate statement contrasting to its initial debut in Example 2. Over top the now ever-telling tool of Medtner's arpeggiated 16ths, it symbolizes this momentary passion together with the fully reasserted *concentrando* (no longer *poco* as in the Exposition), and more importantly offering a grand concluding structural scheme.

The final push is actually a relinquishing of that passion from whence it came. As seen in the Exposition just as it is here in Example 22b, Medtner is now rid of the passionate flowing 16ths, the sustain of the descending chords heard above, overtop the Theme 2 material. With both hands again uniting in one final contrary motion, Medtner doubles the length of this statement from the Exposition, restarting again, thereby suspending the final resolution and

descending even lower with each successive entrance. It is then that in diminution do the long sustains of the Theme 4 motivic idea, the long nostalgic yearnings present throughout the whole work, finally give way by further descent into the return of the Introductory Theme 1, the return of A minor. This structural arch is the last rekindling of such memories before resolving inward completely from whence it began. A final rise and fall, now with an air of strength, an objective observation with a subtly changed heart in Medtner's *mobile egualmente*, but also not without its resign, to this final resting place of reminiscence.

It is clear now upon an examination of one of his greatest works, the *Sonata Reminiscenza*, Op.38 No.1, in seeing and hearing Medtner's unabashedly traditional origins upon which he writes his music. While many a composer at the time may feel it exhausted, searching instead for an entirely new musical idea or language, Medtner proves it is in the very nature of such musical foundations that one can be uniquely expressive. Despite the nearly limitless examples to draw inspiration, Medtner always creates a sound truly his own via an organic meshing of complex contrapuntalism, harmonic and melodic chromaticism, and the juxtapositions of passion and serenity through color.

This cumulative approach has the listener, the critic, the performer recollecting the greatest experiences of music in their ears. Always multi-layered in its textural depth and musical meaning, Medtner maintains a clarity of the highest order throughout. Yet it is this very recollecting and complexity that makes many fail to understand Medtner at first pass. Too cerebral some criticize, too conventional others still, in its dense score and formulaically accurate execution. It is in these very labels however that one should realize his true genius. Even attributing this to calling him the 'Russian Brahms', if stamping such large overarching labels, one may even be akin to calling Medtner the 'Russian Mozart' – through his remarkable

symmetry of clarity and passion in the leanest of means, while existing within an architecture of divine design. Perhaps even the melodically inspired versus the underlying immediate rhythmic eccentricities, chromatic flavors, contrapuntal melodies and textures amidst juxtaposing characters (further seen in his shorter works in the *Forgotten Melodies* or the ever popular *Skazka*), will undoubtedly recall such characteristics and ‘eccentricities’ from even the likes of Robert Schumann. As seen in the *Sonata Reminiscenza*, Medtner’s language however is one of numerous facets, influences and inspirations. Far more than a contrived style, it is as much dark and outwardly passionate, as it can be dancing and playful, with a transparency and buoyancy whilst remaining classically traditional in its foundation.

See, it is this vast landscape, this far reaching pool which the music of Medtner draws upon. Yet it is this vastness that can seem at first insurmountable, only upon each further encounter that the curiosity of the listener is further peaked, soon emboldened to listen again and again to uncover a new layer each time. Soon Medtner becomes the best kind of addiction, one which grows the musician himself, gathering such an all-encompassing vision, further enticing them to seek more. The music continually revealing itself, it is an ever growing, original world of imagination.

Fueled and encouraged by an artistically avid family, and later his renowned mentors, Medtner’s own pianistic foundations are front and center when considering any of his compositions. His prowess at the keyboard garnering him the highest praise for his solo recitals shows clearly in the many carefully utilized technical challenges. However as seen with Medtner, it is always with musical purpose. Still, Medtner is said to have at times ‘too many notes’. Ernest Newman writes,

The first thing that strikes anyone acquainted with Medtner's music as a whole is his extraordinary technical competence. A musician more thoroughly skilled in the mere craft of composition could not be imagined. . . But I am not sure that the technique did not, in the earlier works, sometimes get in the way of his thinking. His mastery of device was in excess of his invention. . . His superlative pianism, too, has been something of a disadvantage. . . It has made him occasionally overload his scores with notes. . . Many of his early works are virtually studies in particular pianistic problems, especially problems of rhythm and cross-rhythm.

(10)

What constitutes such an observation? The very disposition and outlook of Medtner on life and art is a direct contradiction to this claim. It is most often a lack of investigation, a lack of truly seeing what lies beneath. Never a phrase or gesture for virtuoso demonstration, or piece constructed of mainly passage work, even the densest of compositions always has his signature clarity of texture and voice. Still, Newman goes on to say, "In the fine Sonata in E minor Op.25 No.2... the writing is as purely pianistic as in any of his early works... the more he shakes off the tyranny of his super-pianism the clearer his music becomes, without any loss of weight" (10). True, there will always be a time when a composer sounds less inspired, a less clear voice, especially as they develop their own craft. But when examining Medtner's output one always comes back to the same core truth – the music always serves a higher purpose, a purpose that he tirelessly sought out with each artistic and personal action. Always adamant of the integrity of art and life he even "...reproached Rachmaninov for not always using his talent justly and lamented his presumed defections to fashion and sensation" (Rimm 116). Going so far as to say "He prostituted himself for the dollar" (123).

Further examples if looking at some of his earlier *Skazka*, the Op.14 or his Sonata in F minor, Op.5, despite the monumental compositional and pianistic talent, Medtner lives and writes with these only as a vehicle to the heart. The pureness of voice in the lyrical Op.5, Op.14 No.1, or the rhythmic intricacies in the driven and brooding *March of the Paladin* Op.14 No.2. These are even immediately perceptible in his first published Op.1 *Stimmungsbilder* (Mood Pictures), a veritable precursor to the *Skazka*. One can hear in the opening *Prologue* of Op.1 the soaring expressive melody within a subtly complex cross-rhythm overarching to an almost exhaustingly long and beautiful melodic line and structure. While clearly obvious to the contrary, Newman implies these qualities only exist in later, mature compositions of Medtner, “His later works abound in rhythmic novelties and felicities to which there is no parallel in Brahms; and the rhythm, however unexpected it may be, always gives the impression of perfect spontaneity and inevitableness” (Newman 10). Conversely, many of the most esteemed artists and scholars speak of Medtner as a composer hard to succeed his earliest compositions later in life due to their sheer mastery. Eugene Istomin urges the momentous recent discovery of Medtner’s music in the new *Dover Edition*, “He is not a quintessential Russian composer; he is a master for all, and perhaps his time has come” (xi). And amidst the greatest of love, and the harshest of criticism between lifelong compatriots, Sergei Rachmaninov even proclaimed Medtner the greatest composer of his time.

What we have seen is no doubt a maturing in Medtner’s output but also a greater understanding by the greatest musical minds to see such redeemable qualities. Medtner’s language has only further clarified and become efficient in its means over time. But it is the many layers of complexity in the entire spectrum of his output united with his oneness with compositional form that put Medtner on a level of depth like few others through his entire life

output. His now iconic and seemingly exhaustible methods of melodic, rhythmic and even structural variety, often happening all at the same time, are so clearly evident throughout the *Sonata Reminiscenza* Op.38, and in the lighter works that follow. Medtner here sees the virtue and the contrast in both the emotional weight and clarity of the Sonata versus its carefree, ‘fun-first’ approach to composition in the shorter works thereafter. That he can come in and out of his own cerebral and emotional forbearing in one composition to take that ever elusive detached, objective look immediately following, is a remarkable feat in and of itself, as even the veteran listener has difficulty with such a task! So as this constant juxtaposition of musical and philosophical thought abound in his music at all times, inevitably they also shine in various ways in performance. The advanced musician will find this an invaluable resource as both a rare practical and inspirational discovery of the true scope of Nikolai Medtner’s genius. To simultaneously provide a detailed discovery into the rich, vast and complex musical world of Medtner while providing an advantageous analytical and performance tool for all looking to venture beneath the surface of his music.

To the unfamiliar listener, Medtner’s music may mean either nothing at all, or everything in this world. Those who approach a work of art in an exterior or modish frame of mind, looking merely for exciting novelty, nerve-wracking stimulants, and a dose of flattery to prevailing fashion, will be completely disappointed. But to those who are ready to shake off all accretion, and look straight for the infallible principles of all great art, Medtner will be a revelation.

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